Shadows From Another World by BadWolfeRose

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Summary: El has been with the Doctor and Rose for quite some time, and has begun to hate hiding away. When they're called back to Hawkins, it becomes harder for El to not try to see her friends again. But the worst thing of all is the Upside Down: it's gotten bigger and more dangerous. Will they be able to fix things this time around? (Sequel to There Are Stranger Things Than You, Bad Wolf)

1. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

Prologue- Going Back

(A/N: Hey guys and welcome to the sequel! This prologue is almost an interlude, or maybe "the calm before the storm". No timeline for this chapter, although we get dropped into the story on the episode Trick or Treat, Freak. Assume that for Doctor Who, it's in between any two non-chaotic series 6 episodes. I really need to rewatch, but oh well. Anyway, in our intro, we get a glimpse of what El's life with Rose and the Doctor is like.)

Three hundred and fifty-three days. That was how long it had been since El had seen her friends, and it had been at least ten months since she came to live with the Doctor and Rose. Her hair had grown back somewhat, she was no longer in danger, and she knew more things, but it wasn't the same as living with her friends in Hawkins. Even though she had two very nice people to keep her company. Amy and Rory weren't there- Amy had wanted even more time at home after finding out that she was pregnant.

Currently, Eleven was in the console room, preoccupied with an odd sort of toy in her hand- the Doctor had gotten it for her during a visit to a planet she had forgotten the name of. She often fiddled with various objects when bored, but this one was by far her favorite- it had plenty of pulleys and buttons and other things to mess with. She spun a tiny gear around, watching other parts connected to it move.

The Doctor suddenly appeared out of nowhere, as he often did. He looked as though he had just woken up, though he didn't sleep often. "Morning, El," he told her cheerfully, grinning. She smiled back, but didn't look him in the eye.

"Morning," she mumbled, still focused on the toy. "Where's Rose?"

"Still asleep," he replied quickly, before chuckling a bit. "You like that

thing, don't you?"

El shrugged. "Yeah."

"You hungry? I know Rose is still sleeping and we usually eat together, but I can get you something if you want it."

The Doctor smiled to himself- if, a couple years ago, someone had told him he'd be taking care of a child- with *Rose*, no less- and almost treating her like she was his own, he would have thought they were mad. And yet, here he was, asking a thirteen-year-old girl what she wanted for breakfast while Rose was sound asleep in their room.

Eleven brought him out of his musings when she grinned and nodded. "Eggos?" she asked excitedly.

The Doctor sighed and rolled his eyes- that was all she ever wanted to eat. "You had that for breakfast *yesterday*. You can't keep eating them all the time; 's not good for you. Pick something else; preferably something *healthier*."

She tried to protest. "But-"

"Jane," he said, slightly stern. "No arguments."

Jane. That was still somewhat foreign to her. She found out about her name one night when she asked the Doctor if she had a mother- he had said something in passing about his own. He told her that yes, she did have one. Couldn't have really been born if she didn't. When she asked if her mother was gone, he had said, "More or less".But he also told her that he knew her mother would have loved her very much, and mentioned that her mother would have called her Jane had Brenner not given her the name Eleven. She, in turn, requested that he and Rose call her that, at least sometimes. But the new name still made her jump slightly.

In the end, she decided not to argue with the Doctor.

Rose made an appearance in the galley when El was about halfway done with her meal- eggs and bacon, the latter of which the Doctor

said he hated. Referred to it as "poison", much to El's amusement; considering she liked it quite a bit.

Rose mumbled "good morning" to the both of them sleepily, before stumbling over to the teakettle. She nearly dropped it, however, when the phone suddenly rang shrilly, making her jump.

"Why do we always get phone calls at an ungodly hour?" she groaned, despite the fact that there was no real concept of time on the TARDIS.

"Ah, I'll tell them to get lost, don't worry," the Doctor replied, before walking over to Rose and kissing the top of her head. She grinned, but shooed him away. "Go answer the bloody phone! God!" she snapped, though she was giggling.

"Oi, language!" he said teasingly, laughing as he made his way to the console room.

By the time the Doctor got there, the phone had stopped ringing. He wondered whether he should pick it up anyway, but that question was answered for him when it began ringing again two seconds later.

"Must be important," he mumbled to himself before picking up the receiver. "Hello?"

"*Hey, Doc,"* came the drawling voice on the other end. *"Took you long enough to answer. And you would* not believe *the bullcrap I had to deal with yesterda-"*

"Why are you calling me, Hopper? Hmm? What's the problem?" he shot back impatiently, cutting him off.

"*Yikes. What's eating you? Don't answer that, by the way. I don't wanna know. Look, there's this...weird thing going on. A bunch of farms had their crops go all rotten overnight, and nobody knows for sure what happened to them- I sure as hell can't figure it out. I'm a little worried it might be related to the other dimension. Also, Will's been having some trouble. The doctors said that post-traumatic stress has been bothering him- nightmares, flashbacks, that kind of thing. I think he might enjoy it if you guys visited to cheer him up a little- he likes you two. I'm sure Joyce would*

appreciate it too."

The Doctor nodded, but sighed in frustration. "You're probably being paranoid, Hopper. But, lucky for you, I'm very cautious when it comes to that place. So, I'll come and help you figure this out. And I know Rose wouldn't mind visiting Will. Now, I need coordinates. When and where?"

"*Anywhere in Hawkins is fine, so long as you're out of sight. I can drive you guys to the farm where it first happened. Then you can check up on Will and Joyce. As for the when, come around three."*

"I need the date, Hopper. Including the year."

Hopper rolled his eyes- time travel definitely made things like this conversation very weird.*"October 31st,1984. And* do not *bring the kid, remember that. Get a damn babysitter if you have to, just don't risk her being seen."*

"Yeah, I know the drill. Bye," the Doctor said shortly, not bothering to wait for a reply before hanging up.

When he put the receiver back in its place, he sighed. Going back to Hawkins but convincing El to stay behind in the TARDIS was going to be difficult. Very difficult. Oh, well. He supposed he'd better hurry up and try to work things out.

"We're going to Hawkins?"

The Doctor almost felt sorry for El on account of her hopeful tone. "Technically, yes. But you can't come with me. You have to stay behind in the-"

"Why?" she almost whined.

"You *know* why, Jane. We can't risk you being seen. 'S not worth it. Remember, risks- well, most risks- are very stupid. And..." He gave her an expectant look.

She almost glared back at him. "We're not stupid."

"Exactly. Rule number one- don't do anything stupid. Well, rule number one for you, anyway. Don't worry, Rose will keep you company while I'm gone. Right?"

Rose smiled and nodded. "Right. We'll have fun, El. You'll see," she said cheerfully.

El said nothing in response, instead choosing to shrug, get down from the table, and walk off in the direction of her room.

Rose gave the Doctor a concerned glance when they noticed that. "Should we try and talk to her, or..." she said uncertainly.

He sighed, sitting down next to Rose. "Let's give her a minute first. I don't think she wants to talk right now."

He was definitely right about that. When El got to her room, she collapsed onto her bed, sighing heavily. She didn't know whether she was angry, sad, or both. Probably both. Rolling onto her side, El allowed her eyes to linger on her bedside table, which was covered in framed photographs and trinkets from various planets and time periods they had visited.

She picked up the photo that was in the center of the table. It was one of her favorites- the three of them at a diner in 1956, taken about a month ago. (Rose had wanted to go to that year, and snapped the picture when no one was looking.) All three of them were smiling and laughing like idiots, she and Rose both with sunglasses on their heads.
El remembered that not long after the picture had been taken, an older woman had come up to Rose and the Doctor and told them that "their daughter was very beautiful", and they had smiled and thanked her.

Sometimes she closed her eyes and tried to pretend that they were her real family. That she'd been with them all her life. And sometimes she could convince herself that, but only while her eyes were shut. For when she opened them, it all came rushing back.

El was broken out of her thoughts by a soft knock on her door. "El?

Can I come in?" the Doctor called out. His tone of voice indicated that he wasn't angry, only concerned. So she opened the door telekinetically.

"You know, you should really stop doing that; you'll get lazy," he said jokingly upon entering the room.

When El stayed quiet, her back facing him, the Doctor walked over to her and sat down on the side of her bed. "Hey," he whispered softly. "We're only going back there to make sure there isn't a problem with the other dimension, alright? Kind of like a check-up. That's all. And when it's safe, I'll take you back there, and you can see your friends."

"Promise?" she murmured, rolling onto her back so she could look up at him.

He gave her a tiny smile and took her hand. "Promise." He paused, sighing. "Are we good?"

That was the question he always asked her when they had a disagreement- if the answer was no, she could tell him what was bothering her. But this time, she smiled and nodded. "We're good."

The Doctor's hint of a smile turned into a grin as he ruffled her hair affectionately and she tried to swat his hand away. "Hey! Cut it out," she said between laughs.

"Oh, all right. Now, I'm going to take the TARDIS back to Hawkins. Rose will keep an eye on you while I'm gone, as I said earlier. You two can do whatever you want- within reason, obviously. No trying to fulfill a death wish."

She laughed at his joke before replying, "Okay."

(A/N: Yes, this chapter was extremely self-indulgent for me. I had to write a couple of cute moments to get them out of my system, okay? But I hope you liked this chapter- as I said, calm before the storm.)

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Unpleasant Discovery

(A/N: For some reason, there's a lot of sniping between the Doctor and Hopper in this chapter. I didn't plan it, it just...happened. To be fair, the Doctor (especially this incarnation) is a hyperactive giant nerd and Hopper is just constantly tired of everything and has no patience with people.)

The TARDIS landed within a few minutes of taking off, which meant that the Doctor, Rose, and El were in Hawkins on October 31st, 1984; around 3:30 PM.

"Well, you'll have to apologize for being a little late," Rose said absently, upon noticing the time.

"Yeah, I know," he muttered, still distracted. He looked over at El, who was watching him from the jump seat. "I'll see you later, okay? Rose will watch you for a while, but when I get back here, we're both going to visit Joyce. So you'll be by yourself for a bit. Well, you won't be completely alone, considering the TARDIS can talk to you. But d'you think you'll be alright if we leave for an hour or two?"

El nodded. "Yes."

The Doctor smiled at her, before walking over and placing his hand on her shoulder. "Be careful, alright? And remember- you have to stay here and not do anything stupid," he murmured, grinning when she nodded again.

He said a brief goodbye to both of them before walking out of the TARDIS and closing the door behind him.

"Okay...time to visit the police station," he said with a sigh. Hopper hadn't given him a specific meeting location, so that seemed to be the

best way to let him know they were here.

Some time later, the Doctor sat in the passenger seat of Hopper's car. The first part of the drive was filled with awkward silence, until Hopper broke it.

"So, Doc, how you been?"

The Doctor rolled his eyes- the children calling him "Doc" was one thing, while Hopper doing it was another. He said nothing about it, however, only replied, "Fine, thanks. You?"

Hopper groaned. "Well, up until yesterday everything was just fine. Same old, same old. Then some crazy freelance reporter guy comes in, convinced that there's a girl with a shaved head being used as a spy for the Russians in Hawkins. Says she "may have psionic abilities." Of course, he's right about that last part, but I wasn't about to tell him that. Then I get a phone call- bunch of pumpkins in a field went rotten overnight. I couldn't figure it out, and the next day I get word that it happened to damn near everyone who grows stuff. No obvious cause. That's when I knew I should probably call you, Doc. Even if it has nothing to do with that dimension, maybe you could help me figure out what happened. I mean, you are some kind of genius. Aren't you?"

He shrugged. "Ah, I'm clever enough, I suppose. But I am well-versed in odd occurrences and the science behind them, so you called the right person." He cleared his throat. "How's Will?"

"Doing pretty good, all things considered. I mean, for somebody who went through hell and back, he's actually holding up okay. I think so, anyway; I'm not a shrink. But yeah, he's getting back into the swing of things, doing normal stuff. From what Joyce has been saying, they're all just trying to forget about what happened," Hopper replied.

The Doctor let out another sigh. "Yeah, I know the feeling. You go through something horrible, you try to forget about it. That's natural."

Hopper nodded in understanding, but then smirked. "How's the kid, by the way?"

He smiled to himself. "Oh, she's doing really well. We've been trying to get her caught up on all the basics- the kind of stuff you learn about in school, like maths and science. She's catching on pretty fast, if you ask me. For someone who was raised as a lab rat for twelve years, she's very smart. Fascinated by all the planets we visit, too."

A half-smile appeared on Hopper's face. "Sarah used to have this picture book about outer space. She loved it. She was always into science- galaxies, the universe, space travel, all that. Meeting you would've been like a dream come true to her. And I think you would've liked her- she was real smart, too. Her mom and I had no idea where she got it from. I still don't know," he said, absentmindedly gazing out of the rearview mirror.

The Doctor gave him a sympathetic look. "It sounds like she was a lovely girl. You're right- I would have enjoyed meeting her. And I'm really sorry about what happened to her."

"Thanks, Doc. That's...nice of you to say. If you don't mind me asking, do you have any kids?"

He sighed again, closing his eyes. "Well, a long time ago, I did. But certain...things happened. It's complicated. But I'm the last of my species, so..." the Doctor shrugged halfheartedly.

"That's rough. Does...Rose know about that?" Hopper asked him slowly.

The Doctor smiled then. "Yeah, she does. She knows a lot more about me than, well...anyone. And I like to think she'd say the same about me."

Hopper chuckled. "You know all of each other's secrets, then. You're like an old married couple. Speaking of which, *are* you married now?" he asked, curious.

The Doctor shook his head. "No. I mean, not yet, anyway. I'm working on it."

"So, in other words, you haven't worked up the nerve to ask her yet?"

"Well, technically...I brought it up last year. In the middle school. Sort of. It was kind of a joke, but...only halfway. She told me she'd think about it, but like I said, joke. As far as asking her properly goes, though...no, I have not done that. But it has nothing to do with *nerves*. I've just been...distracted."

Hopper laughed slightly. "Yeah, because you two have been raising a- oh, we're here already. Well, it looks like you get a reprieve on the interrogation, Doc."

The Doctor rolled his eyes as Hopper parked the car. "Very funny, Hopper. Let's just get to work, alright?"

He trailed after Hopper as the owner of the farm followed them to the rotted pumpkin patch, who said to Hopper, "Now, you tryin' to tell me with a straight face, cold did this?"

Hopper sighed and turned to the owner. "Like I said, my friend here is an expert on this kind of thing. He's seen a lot of weird stuff, and he's a scientist. Doc, can you come look at this?"

The Doctor nodded and stepped close to the rotten fruit. Flies were swarming around it, and the skin had gone from orange to black. It, like many other pumpkins around it, seemed to have been cracked open like an egg.

That was when he noticed the mucus-like substance coating the inside. "Oh, no," he murmured to himself. A discreet scan with the sonic screwdriver confirmed his fear- it was the same substance that was commonly found in the home dimensions of Shadow-Walkers.

Hopper bent down next to him and whispered, "Is it the other dimension?"

The Doctor nodded slowly. "I'm afraid so. But I have no idea how it was able to grow and spread like this."

Hopper stood up and turned back to the landowner. "How far does the rot go?"

"Pretty far, Chief. I can show you. But first your friend needs to tell me what's causing this."

The Doctor sighed. "I'm not quite sure yet. I mean, I have a few theories, but I need to know more. For example, the extent of the rot."

Hopper examined the slime-covered bark on a tree- it was at the boundary of the rot. The Doctor put one hand on the substance, recoiling when it stuck to his hand as he tried to pull away.

"Oh, man. Yuck, yuck, yuck! I forgot how disgusting this stuff was."

The farmer's ears perked up at that. "You've *seen* this before?"

"Well, not this sort of rot, no. But I have seen this substance before- mainly in labs. It's not really dangerous, but *very* unpleasant to touch. Oh, and smell. Rather interesting, though. Its chemical makeup is quite complicated, as it is both strong and easily manipulated. Depends on the situation."

He raised an eyebrow in response. "You some kind of genius or something?"

The Doctor grinned. "Well, I don't believe that intelligence can be accurately measured. But a lot of people have called me a genius, so...I suppose I am."

Hopper rolled his eyes. "Just don't let it get to your head, Doc."

"Hopper, you're starting to sound just like Rose-"

"-Good, she's the only person you listen to."

Suddenly, Hopper's radio crackled to life. *"Chief. Hey, Chief-"*

"-How's it looking over there?"

"*Like a giant pissed all over Jack's bean field. Smells, too. It smell over there?"*

Hopper nodded. "Yeah, a little bit. Listen, I want you guys to track the rot, see how far it goes. Just, uh, mark anything that's dead. And-"

"-*That's gonna take some time, Chief."*

"So take it. And I'm gonna meet you guys down there. I have a friend with me. He's an expert on weird stuff. He can probably figure out the reason behind all this."

A sigh. *"Oh, Lord. Chief, we do not need another Murray Bauman-"*

"This isn't some conspiracy theorist bullshit, Powell. There is an actual scientific reason behind this. And while it pains me to say it-" that statement made the Doctor smirk. "-He's a genius. So whatever science is behind this, he can figure it out, and maybe fix it. Now, I'll see you guys down there."

With that, he disconnected from the radio and pocketed it. Sighing, he focused on the owner. "You got any marking flags?"

Hopper walked back in the direction of his car, the Doctor trailing after him. His patience was growing thinner with every passing second.

If I hear one more word about the behavior of parallel dimensions, I'm gonna shoot myself. Or I might shoot him. Either way, he'd shut up.

"But parallel dimensions- now, these are dimensions, not universes, because they only cover one specific location and are often empty- don't just grow and spread into the real world. Prime dimension, as I call it. It takes a lot of a certain kind of power to manipulate a parallel dimension and overlap it with the prime one, something that is near impossible to get hold of now-"

Hopper groaned. "-Doc, I get that you're confused. But could you please just *stop talking?* For five seconds?"

"Oh. Sorry," the Doctor said distractedly, putting his hands in his pockets. "Let's just go meet up with the other officers."

The Doctor walked ahead of Hopper this time, still rambling about parallel dimensions at 90 miles an hour. But for some reason, he wasn't annoyed by it anymore. Well, not as much, anyway. He supposed he'd almost gotten used to it.

He's like Albert Einstein combined with a kid on a sugar high, Hopper thought to himself. *Hard to believe I didn't lose my patience with him until an hour ago.*

Powell waved them both over when he saw them, Callahan standing behind him. "Hey, Chief. This your friend?"

The Doctor grinned and nodded, but Hopper spoke before he could. "Cal, Powell, this is the Doctor. And yes, that's all he goes by. Doc, this is Phil Callahan and Calvin Powell. But we usually just call each other by our last names."

Callahan piped up, "So he's the weird stuff expert?"

Powell rolled his eyes, before he started to walk down the dirt path again. "Ignore him, Doctor. Now, Chief, we've been marking whatever we can find, but there's a lot of dead things around here. I've never seen anything like this. Hope you can figure out what's causing it, Doc," he said, giving the Doctor a pointed look.

The Doctor smirked and shrugged his shoulders. "Don't worry, I will. Might take a while, but I'll figure this out."

"But aren't you like, a genius or something? You can't tell what it is just by looking at it?" Callahan asked him.

Hopper groaned. "For God's sake, Cal, leave him alone. Just...don't talk, *at all.* Okay?"

"Sheesh. You're in a bad mood today."

"Yeah, well, I must've caught it from your wife this morning," he shot back. The Doctor held his breath to keep himself from laughing at that, instead opting to mock glare at Hopper.

"Really, Hopper? *Really?*"

Hopper was almost laughing now. "Yeah. Really. You don't get to judge my jokes. You're not married and you've never divorced anybody. You'd *be* married, though, if you quit acting like an idiot and just proposed to your damn girlfriend."

"Hopper! That's none of your business," the Doctor snapped, though he wasn't that annoyed. To the left of him, he could hear Callahan mutter a soft "Uh-oh" under his breath, while Powell was wheezing from suppressed laughter.

All the levity and annoyance disappeared, however, when the Doctor got a glimpse of all the rotten crops in the field.

"My God," he gasped out.

Powell nodded. "My thoughts exactly, Doc. This is the weirdest thing I've ever seen."

"If it's spread this much, that can't be good..." he murmured. And then he remembered someone who had spent an extended period of time inside the parallel dimension- Will. Suddenly, he had more reasons to visit him and his mother than a social call.

Spinning around, he took off in the direction of Hopper's car. "Oi, Hopper! I need to borrow your car. I just remembered something very important I have to do!"

Not waiting for a reply, the Doctor climbed into the driver's seat of the vehicle and took off.

(A/N: I feel like there's a lot of potential for banter/sniping between the Doctor and Hopper in the future, because of how they both are. Do you guys agree with me? Oh, and another potential thing is Will's relationship with the Doctor and Rose: He'd probably really look up to the Doctor because he has a horrible dad and the Doctor is one of very few people who wouldn't make him feel bad because of his interests and such. Will would probably see Rose as like, a second mom or something because of how she is and the way she took care of him in the Upside Down. What do you think?)

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Old And New Faces

Rose laughed as she and the Doctor exited the car and headed towards Joyce's house. "I can't believe we stole Hopper's car," she said excitedly.

"First of all, we borrowed. Secondly, *I'm* the one that did it," the Doctor replied, rolling his eyes in mock irritation. He moved his arm back, swinging their joined hands.

Rose sighed, a huge grin spreading over her face. "Oh, come off it. I'm the one that kept you from killing us- an' I know for a fact that you nearly drove off the road several times on your way to pick me up. How did you not get lost? Also, stop swinging our hands around or I'll fling you into the sun," she threatened, still laughing. "You know the rule."

He grinned in return. "Joke's on you. I'm not letting go, so you're coming with me."

Before Rose could say anything in reply, the Doctor led her up the porch steps and knocked on Joyce's front door. To their surprise, an unfamiliar man in a vampire costume answered it.

The man's eyes widened when he saw them. "I knew it was too early for trick-or-treaters," he said, half to himself. Then he smiled politely. "So, can I help you guys?"

The Doctor nodded in response. "Yeah, we're looking for Joyce Byers. Did she move, or..."

The man chuckled. "No, you've got the right house. Joyce is my girlfriend," he explained. "Shocking, I know. You friends of hers or something?"

Rose smiled and nodded. "Yeah, we know each other well enough. Is

she home?"

Before he could answer her, Joyce could be heard walking closer and calling out, "Bob? Who's that at the...door." She cut herself off when her eyes landed on the Doctor and Rose.

Joyce grinned widely before stepping into the doorway. "Well, this is a surprise."

They both grinned at her, the Doctor replying, "Hello, Joyce. How are you?"

"I'm good, thanks. Do you wanna come in?" she asked him, her voice still somewhat shaky even after having Will back for quite a while.

Not waiting for an answer, Joyce stepped back, beckoning them into the house.

Once they were all inside, Joyce focused on the man that was apparently her boyfriend. "So...you don't know each other yet. This is-"

"-Bob Newby," the man cut in, smiling. "And you are..."

The Doctor smiled then too. "Doctor John Smith. And this is Rose Tyler," he replied, motioning to Rose, who smiled and said, "Lovely to meet you."

Joyce turned around very fast. "Oh! I'd better go tell Will that you're here- he's in his room. Jonathan's taking him trick-or-treating in a little bit. But I think he'll be happy to see you," she said quickly, walking off.

Bob gave her a quizzical look, but walked away from the Doctor and Rose due to the phone ringing. "I'd better get that," he muttered.

Rose smirked and elbowed the Doctor in the side. "*Please* tell me you have your camera on you," she whispered.

"Yeah, I do. Why?"

"Because I want to get a picture of him in his costume," she almost whined. "I'm sure it's very cute."

The Doctor chuckled and rolled his eyes in jest. "You insist on mothering every-"

"*Rose!*" Will's excited shout and running footsteps cut him off. Rose, in turn, bent down enough for Will to run up and hug her. "Oh my God, I'm so happy to see you."

Rose grinned, laughing. "I'm glad to see you too, kiddo. How you doing?"

"Awesome. I'm gonna go trick-or-treating with Mike, Dustin, and Lucas. Oh, and there's this new girl at school named Max. She's pretty awesome- she got seven hundred and fifty *thousand points* on Dig Dug at the arcade! And-"

Rose laughed, hugging him again and interrupting him. "Breathe, love, breathe. Now, you remember the Doctor?" she asked him, standing back up when Will pulled away.

Will nodded rapidly, looking up at him. "Yeah. Hi, Doc."

The Doctor grinned and held out his hand. "Hello, Will. Nice to meet you properly. And I'm glad you're doing better."

Will grinned too and took the offered hand, shaking it. "Nice to, uh, meet you properly too. So...how are you guys?"

"Good. We're good," the Doctor replied. "You enjoying Halloween so far?"

Will nodded again. "We're the Ghostbusters, as you can see. I'm Egon, Dustin's Stantz, and Mike and Lucas are both Venkman because they couldn't agree on who should be Winston," he said, gesturing to his costume. "It was *so* embarrassing at school because we were the only ones who dressed up. When do people make those decisions? I mean, everyone dressed up last year, so..."

Rose laughed softly. "It's a conspiracy. It really is."

"Hey, that's what Dustin said!"

She smiled and replied warmly, "Well, I *love* your costume. Doctor, camera? Now."

Will shook his head and covered his face. "Oh, no. Not again," he almost shouted as the Doctor handed the camera to Rose.

"Come on, just a few pictures," she pleaded. "I love Ghostbusters."

"You're as bad as Mom! Ugh, fine."

Rose giggled. "Alright, smile." When he did, she quickly snapped several photos. "Who ya gonna call?" she joked, laughing when Will did.

The Doctor, meanwhile, was grinning at Rose like an idiot. Seeing her interact with children was always enjoyable. It gave him a moment to entertain the idea of them having their own, though he had to stop that train of thought very quickly. Most likely, it wasn't possible.

Suddenly, Will spoke up. "Okay, Bob's in the other room. Can I give it to them now, Mom?"

Joyce smiled and nodded, before turning to the Doctor and Rose. "Will has something for you guys."

He nodded enthusiastically, waving them over to the dining room table. When they both sat down, Joyce nodded again. "Go ahead, sweetie."

"Mom!" he groaned, before grabbing onto what appeared to be a piece of paper and hiding it behind his back. "When I was in the...Upside Down, Rose gave me a photo. Of the TARDIS. So I would know what it looked like. I...drew a picture based on the photo."

The Doctor smiled at him. "Let's see it, then. Rose tells me you're quite the artist."

Will almost looked surprised at that response. "Okay. Here. You can...keep it, by the way. If you want," he stammered, handing the picture to the Doctor.

It was a rather well-drawn replica of the TARDIS, with a sort of galaxy pattern in the background. The Doctor grinned again once he got a good look at it.

"Wow, that's *very* good. Blimey, you're a lot better at this than I was at your age. I'll definitely hold onto it. Thank you."

Rose nodded in agreement, leaning over to look at the picture. "Yes, 's lovely, Will. Nice job."

Will's eyes lit up, and he smiled. "R-Really?"

The Doctor smirked at that. "Well, yeah. You've got quite a bit of talent, I can tell. Give it a few years, and you'll be better than me."

"You draw?" Will asked, curious.

"Sometimes. Mostly, it's just sketching, but...yeah. I like to draw."

Rose briefly glanced at Joyce, who was grinning even wider than the Doctor did some days. She told the Doctor that she would be right back, before getting up and walking over to her.

"You seem happy," she murmured.

Joyce nodded. "Well, most people- well, I should say most *men*, especially- wouldn't be as nice to Will about some of the stuff he likes, and a lot aren't. His dad wasn't, that's for sure. Still isn't," she replied, clearing her throat. "I can tell Will really likes the Doctor, though."

Rose grinned. "'Course he does. Kids always love him."

Joyce rolled her eyes, whispering, "Oh, for God's sake, just get your own already!" At that, they both laughed.

Jonathan suddenly walked in, a video camera in his hands. "Oh, hey, Rose. Doctor," he stammered. "Wasn't expecting you guys."

"Yeah, well, Hopper needed our help with something, and we thought we would, you know, stop by. I guess," the Doctor replied. "How are you, Jonathan?"

"I'm...I'm good," he mumbled. When he turned to Will, though, his face lit up. "You ready to go, bud?"

Will nodded enthusiastically. "Yeah. Let's go."

Joyce walked over to him. "Now, remember, stay close to your brother. And if you get a bad feeling or anything, just tell him to take you straight home. Okay?"

"Okay. Bye, Mom. Bye, guys," he called out over his shoulder as he ran for the front door.

Rose grinned and waved at him. "Have fun. Don't eat too much candy!" she replied, laughing.

"Alright, I won't. Bye!" With that, the door slammed shut behind Will.

Once he had left, Joyce turned around and walked into Will's room. When she reappeared, she had something in her hand. However, she said nothing to Rose and the Doctor- who glanced at each other in confusion- as she walked back into the kitchen.

"Bob?" she called out. "I'll be back in a few minutes; I'm going out!" With that, she all but ran back into the living room. "Come on," she said briskly, motioning for the Doctor and Rose to follow her.

When they were a good distance away from the house, Joyce sighed, before showing something to the Doctor and Rose- Will's drawing of a shadowy creature.

"See this? This is something that Will drew. He wouldn't tell me why he did it- but there's a field near here that's an exact match for this drawing. I dunno if he had another episode, or-"

"-Episode?" Rose interjected. "What, you mean, like...flashbacks? Or nightmares?"

Joyce nodded. "The doctors said it would get worse before it got better, especially because we're getting close to the anniversary of it, but this...he never said anything about it until recently. I'm worried."

The Doctor took the paper from her, carefully studying the appearance of the creature in the drawing. "What did he say, exactly?"

Joyce sighed. "When he went to see his psychiatrist- who works with Hawkins Lab- he said that all of a sudden, he was *there* again. In that other dimension. And...there was a storm. He said he saw that...*thing* in the drawing there. And he felt frozen, like he couldn't move. Said he could feel- or sense- this evil, that wanted to kill. Not him, though. Everyone else."

"This rings a bell. A faint, distant one, but still a bell. Don't worry, I'll do whatever I can to get to the bottom of this," the Doctor replied, looking at Joyce sincerely. "Is there anything else?"

She nodded. "Bit of a lighter topic, but...yeah. I mentioned this to Rose already." With that, a small smile appeared on the corners of Joyce's mouth. "I just wanna thank you again, for helping me get my boy back. And for being nice to him. He was so proud of that drawing he did for you guys."

The Doctor grinned at her. "You're welcome, Joyce. And I meant what I said- he really is quite talented."

Joyce smiled more fully then. "He really likes you, you know. He's not really used to people besides me and his friends making time for him. Or complimenting his drawings. I think what you did was very kind."

Rose smiled at her and spoke up before the Doctor could. "We could keep an eye on them, if you want. I mean, I know Jonathan's watching Will, but it'd be good if we were nearby, in case something else odd happens."

Joyce nodded in agreement. "Go ahead. I trust you. And if anything at all happens, please come back here as soon as you can and tell me."

The Doctor grinned and nodded in reply, but suddenly looked at the ground. "Well, I need to make a little detour first. I kind of...stole Hopper's car...I need to give it back."

Joyce's eyes widened, and she burst out laughing. "Oh my G- wow. Surprised he hasn't arrested you yet."

Rose joined in her laughing. "Well, he did tell Hopper he was borrowing it. I'm the one who used the word stole. But don't worry- we'll keep an eye on those kids. We'd best get going."

(A/N: My favorite redhead will be introduced in the next chapter! But in the meantime, hope you like the interactions between the Doctor, Rose, and Will. And Bob will still have his role in this, don't worry. Whether his fate will be the same as in canon, however, remains to be seen. Also, I am still open to alternate Mind Flayer name suggestions.)

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Shadowed Echoes

The Doctor walked hand in hand with Rose down the dimly lit street. He drew in a sharp breath and sighed, thinking back to all that had taken place in the last hour or so.

First he had given Hopper his car back, and while he wasn't arrested, he did receive a threat- albeit as a joke. Then they had gone back to the TARDIS to check up on El, who they had to gently explain to why she couldn't go trick-or-treating- ghost costume or no, it was still a risk neither of them were willing to take. Rose had promised her, however, that they would buy her a lot of candy before coming back. She had also offered to watch a scary movie with her- something the Doctor had requested they leave him out of. And now he and Rose were keeping watch over the four boys, who were easy to locate in their Ghostbusters costumes.

Will was holding the video camera and conversing with his friends happily. Jonathan, however, was nowhere to be found. The Doctor supposed Will had left him behind somewhere.

As they got close enough to be within earshot, the Doctor and Rose had to fight to keep from laughing.

"If I get another 3 Musketeers, I'm gonna kill myself," Lucas complained.

Dustin shot back, "What's wrong with 3 Musketeers?"

"'*What's wrong with 3 Musketeers?*'"

Mike nodded in agreement. "Yeah, no one likes 3 Musketeers. It's just nougat."

"'*Just nougat*'? It is top three for me," Dustin replied, seemingly shocked.

They continued arguing about candy bars while Rose snickered and the Doctor broke into a grin. "Personally, I like them," he said to her, perhaps a bit loudly.

Rose raised an eyebrow at him, prepared to say something, when Dustin whirled around and exclaimed, "Yes! Thank you, random-*Doc?!*"

Dustin grinned and waved. "Holy *shit*, you guys! You're back?"

Rose and the Doctor grinned in unison and walked closer, nodding. "Yep! We're back," the former said brightly.

Will nodded and turned to his friends. "Yeah, I forgot to tell you. They, uh...visited me and Mom earlier. It was fun," he said, glancing at them briefly.

Dustin laughed and ran over, with Lucas and Will behind him. "Hey, man! How you been? We didn't call you or anything. So...why're you guys *here?*"

Will gave the Doctor a sideways glance. "Did Mom put you up to this? I can't do *anything* by myself anymor-"

The Doctor shook his head. "Nope. Hopper had a bit of a problem earlier today, and we decided to visit you and your mum while we were here. Right now, though, I'm just keeping an eye out for anything suspicious, seeing as I haven't fixed the problem yet."

Rose nodded in agreement. "Yeah, observation is important. Just pretend we're not here."

Dustin nodded. "Okay. By the way, where's the redhead and her husband?"

The Doctor smirked in reply. "Amy and Rory are at their house, Dustin. Their own timeline."

Dustin nodded again, before spinning around and starting to walk in the other direction. Just behind him, the Doctor caught sight of Mike-who was giving him and Rose a bitter glare. Before the Doctor could

do anything, however, another trick-or-treater in a Michael Myers costume jumped out in front of the boys.

All four of them shrieked and tumbled backwards, nearly falling to the ground. Lucas' scream was particularly shrill, and made Rose fight back a grin.

The costumed figure burst out laughing, before pulling off their mask. It was a girl with long ginger hair that the Doctor and Rose didn't recognize.

"Holy shit! You should've seen the looks on your faces." The girl glanced at Lucas. "And you? Who screams like that? You sound like a little girl."

She collapsed into laughing again, but stopped when catching a glimpse of the Doctor and Rose. "Who the hell are you? Aren't you guys a *little* old for this?"

The Doctor grinned and shook his head. "Nah, we're out here for different reasons. We-"

Dustin cut him off. "This is the Doctor, but we just call him Doc. I dunno if he likes that or not, but whatever. And this is Rose, his...wife?" He frowned when Rose shook her head. "You're *still* not married? Ah, whatever. At least you got your shit together. Doc, Rose, this is-"

In turn, the girl interrupted him. "It's Max. I'm new here. What about you guys?"

Rose grinned. "We're...well, I guess you could say investigators. Anything weird starts happening anywhere, we try to figure it out and fix it. An' it's nice to meet you, Max."

Max shrugged. "You too, I guess. Investigating sounds cool. This guy your boyfriend, or..."

Rose shrugged. "Pretty much. I can't think of a better way to explain it."

Max smirked. "That's kinda weird. Anyway-" She turned her attention

to the boys. "Are you guys coming or not? Oh, I heard we should hit up Loch Nora. That's where the rich people live, right?"

With that, she turned around, replaced her mask, and kept walking. Dustin and Lucas both glanced at each other and laughed excitedly. "Yeah!" They all but ran after her, with Will walking close behind. Mike, however, lingered.

He sighed and gave the Doctor and Rose another cold glare. When they glanced at him with concern, he snapped, "Leave me alone," and stomped after his friends.

Some time later, the Doctor and Rose were getting ready to head back to the TARDIS, as nothing odd had taken place. That changed, however, when they walked past the neighborhood the boys had gone to- Loch Nora.

One minute Will was walking with his friends; laughing with Dustin and Lucas, who were glad to have Max around- unlike Mike, who did not seem to care for her. The next he was shouting in fear, as some older kids had jumped out to scare and poke fun at him.

What really worried the Doctor and Rose, though, was that when they moved closer to check on him, he got to his feet with a terrified expression on his face.

"Mike?" he called out. "Mike! *Mike*!"

Suddenly, he looked up, panting in fear. His gaze was fixed directly on the Doctor and Rose, but he seemed to be looking straight through them. His eyes got wider and his mouth opened slightly, before he turned around and ran blindly in the direction of an unknown house.

The Doctor and Rose gave each other looks of alarm before running after him. "Will?" Rose shouted. "Will, come back!"

They followed him down a set of stairs, calling out his name. However, he never turned around- almost as if he was unable to hear them.

At the base of the stairs, Will crouched down against a wall,

breathing heavily. When he started whimpering, Rose reached out and grabbed onto his shoulder. "Will!"

Finally, he opened his eyes and knew she was there. "Will, what's wrong? Are you hurt? What did you see?"

Will said nothing, only continued to whimper. Rose put an arm around him, attempting to calm him. A moment later, she was distracted by his friends running down the stairs.

"Will? I couldn't find you. Are you okay?" Mike asked, panicked. Dustin, Max, and Lucas were just behind him, the first of them shouting, "Holy shit!"

Rose pulled back, but kept her hand on his shoulder. "I'm gonna get you home, okay?" Before Will could respond, though, Mike walked forward. "I'm coming with you."

He, Rose, and the Doctor all helped Will to his feet, then Dustin protested. "Mike, why are you-"

"-Keep trick-or-treating. I'm bored anyways," he snapped. He then walked off with the Doctor and Rose, supporting Will with one arm. "Come on, we'll go to my house."

When they did reach Mike's house, they slipped in through the back door so Mike's parents wouldn't notice the Doctor and Rose. They spent several minutes in silence, Mike and Will sharing Halloween candy while the Doctor and Rose alternated between keeping a watchful eye on the basement stairs and glancing at each other worriedly.

Will was the first one to break the silence. "I had another episode. I don't really understand them. They say they're flashbacks, but it...feels real."

The Doctor nodded, a thoughtful expression on his face. "Well, when you have a flashback, it does feel that way. Like you're there. Trust me, I know from experience."

But Will shook his head. "But flashbacks are when you see things that

already happened, right?" When the Doctor nodded, he continued. "Well, this isn't...this isn't like that. I don't see things that happened to me- I don't, like, see Rose in there or anything. It doesn't feel like a flashback. It's more like...like I'm stuck."

Rose tilted her head in confusion. "What d'you mean by stuck? Like stuck in the Upside Down?" Oddly enough, she had managed to remember what the kids had named the other dimension.

Will shook his head again. "No. You know, like, a View-Master, when it gets like..."

For the first time since coming back to his house, Mike spoke up. "-Caught between two slides?"

Will turned his head to face him and nodded. "Yeah, like that. Like, one slide is our world, and the other...The other slide is the Upside Down."

He paused, taking a deep breath. "And...there was this noise, coming from everywhere. And then...I saw something."

The Doctor and Rose shared a look of alarm not unlike the one they had when Will had started yelling; as Mike asked, wide-eyed, "The Shadow-Walker?"

"No. It was like...this huge shadow, in the sky. Only...it was alive. And it was coming for me."

Mike couldn't think of a response, other than to ask, "Is this all real? Or is it like the doctors say, all in your head?"

Will shrugged. "I don't know. Just...please don't tell the others, okay? They won't understand." He then looked at the Doctor and Rose. "And don't tell my mom. She doesn't need to know." The Doctor said nothing, only nodded. However, he silently told himself he'd inform Will's mother if anything else happened.

Mike replied, breaking the silence, "Eleven would. She'd understand."

"She would?"

Mike nodded. "Yeah. She always did."

Suddenly, the Doctor was reminded of himself, back when he first lost Rose and was traveling with Martha. He had been a broken man, mourning her. At least more broken than he was now. And he had said something very similar about Rose then to what Mike had just said about El now.

"*Rose would know. She always knew."*

And that was when he realized that somehow, through some twist of fate, Mike did not know that El was alive and safe. Now hardly seemed to be a good time to mention it, though.

Mike smiled slightly after the mention of her name. "Sometimes I feel like...I still see her. Like she's still around, but...she never is."

The Doctor sighed and stepped closer to Mike. "When I lost Rose, the same thing-"

Mike glared and cut him off. "-That doesn't help at all! You got Rose *back*!" Rose looked rather uncomfortable at that.

Will sighed. "Mike, stop yelling at him. It wasn't his fault. Or Rose's."

The kindness that was in Will's eyes, coupled with the fact that he did not blame the Doctor for any of what had happened to an innocent girl made the Doctor's hearts want to break. True, El was alright now, but neither Will nor Mike were aware of that. And she hadn't deserved to be hurt the way she was when the Doctor had first come across her.

And that was the reminder the Doctor needed- he and Rose had a girl waiting for them back home, and they had a promise to keep. "Rose and I are going to go, if that's alright," he murmured, smiling slightly when both Mike and Will nodded. "Good. Now, if you two need me, just call the number I left you, alright?"

When they nodded again, he took Rose's hand and led her to the side door. "Goodnight."

Will left Mike's house not long after they did, leaving Mike alone in his room with his walkie-talkie. He did what he had done for the last three hundred and fifty-two days: picked it up and used it to try and contact El.

Speaking into the comm, Mike murmured, "It's day 353. I had a bad day today. I don't know. I guess...I wish you were here. I mean, we all do. If you're out there, just...please, give me a sign."

Suddenly, he almost...*felt* another presence in the room. Looking up, hardly daring to believe, he called out, "Eleven?"

Unbeknownst to him, she had heard nearly every single message he left her for the past three hundred and fifty-three days. Due to circumstance, however, she had been unable to say anything back. That he could hear, anyway.

Which is why, some time later, the Doctor and Rose came home to the TARDIS and found a girl that refused to come out of her room- she had locked the door. From behind the barrier, they could hear her crying softly. Between her sobs, she called out a painfully familiar name.

"*Mike!*"

(A/N: Look at all this angst. LOOK AT IT! Sorry. Also, I am still and probably always will be open to suggestions for Mind Flayer names. Another also, what do you think of the Mike/El and Doctor/Rose parallels? They are legit on the same level it's just different because Mike and El are kids. And we've reached the end of Trick or Treat, Freak.)

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Arguments and Answers

(A/N: We begin and end the episode The Pollywog in this chapter! Events from this episode play a smaller role for the Doctor and Rose plotwise, but a bigger role in character development- especially where El is concerned. Hope you enjoy!)

The Doctor grew increasingly impatient and worried as he tried the door for the fifth time and it still refused to budge. "Come on," he grumbled, rattling the knob. "Eleven?" he called out. "El, please open the door."

"Go away!" came the shout from inside. Rose gave the Doctor an alarmed look, but he shook his head and waved his hand dismissively, before leaning over and whispering to her, "Let me handle this." Rose nodded in understanding and walked back in the direction of the console room.

Seeing as he was out of options, the Doctor finally decided to ask the TARDIS to unlock the door.

Please? She really needs someone to talk to her, even if she doesn't want that.

The TARDIS gave him the mental equivalent of a sigh and unlocked the door, albeit somewhat begrudgingly. The Doctor nodded up at the ceiling in thanks before opening the door and walking into El's room.

"El?" he murmured, turning his head to the side when he didn't see her right away. She was, like he expected, curled up on top of her bed, facing the wall. She said nothing, only sighed heavily and sniffled.

The Doctor moved towards her very slowly, and sat down on her bed when he reached her. "Hey, what's wrong?"

El shook her head, still refusing to look at him. "Go away," she got out, her voice thick with emotion.

The Doctor shook his head. "Not until you tell me what happened," he murmured, placing one hand on her back in what he hoped was a comforting gesture. "You visited Mike again, didn't you? In your head."

She sighed and nodded. "He says he needs me."

That was something he'd never heard a child that age say about someone else before, unless it was a parent or relative. He realized he forgot to ask Mike about the note he left, and guilt began to rise in his chest. "Yeah, that's because he misses you," the Doctor murmured. "Probably just as much as you miss him. And..." he sighed. "I don't think he got my note. But I'll tell him you're alive the *minute* I see him again, okay?"

El finally rolled over onto her other side to look at him. "Will you tell him I'm here?"

The Doctor shook his head no. "Hopper told me it's very important that no one who lives here- besides him- knows where you are. And that includes Mike. What if he said he was going to go see you and a spy overheard? He could be followed. And I'd rather not run the risk of you being found- not to mention the TARDIS. If someone from that lab found her...we would be in very big trouble. Understand?"

El nodded, but sniffled again. "I want to see him."

"And you will. Not just in your head, either- you'll get to see him in real life. But for now, you can't. Don't worry, though- I'll tell him you're okay," he murmured, smiling warmly at her.

"Now...I believe I promised you something. What was it?" he muttered, pretending to think for a moment. "Oh, yeah! I said we would get you a bunch of candy, maybe even watch a movie. And we kept that promise. So...would you like to go eat some candy and stay

up half the night?" he asked teasingly, grinning.

She laughed softly and nodded. "Okay."

The Doctor reached out and brushed a strand of hair behind her ear, the warm smile still on his face. "Are we good, Jane?"

Unlike the day before, however, she didn't nod immediately- rather, she simply shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know."

He sighed. "I suppose I can understand that. I mean, if I were you, I'd still be a little angry at me, too. I know it's not fair, everything that you've gone through; and I'm sorry. About all of it. So if you ever want or need to, you can talk to me. Or Rose, if you'd prefer. She's a good listener. Just...if something is bothering you, let us know. And not just when we disagree, okay? You can talk to us whenever you like, and it can be about *anything*. I want to make sure that you know you're not alone, El."

El nodded again, indicating that she understood his words. The Doctor grinned at her again, feeling happier when she returned the smile. "Now, let's go eat candy and watch movies, yeah?"

She laughed again, more fully this time. "Yeah, okay."

Unbeknownst to him, El was more than a little angry, but she chose to not say anything. Rather, she spent the rest of the night with him and Rose, trying to forget everything for a few hours.

The next day, Rose and the Doctor seemed determined to make things up to her, as they let her eat and do almost anything she wanted. El mainly spent time with them, watching television and playing games with Rose or following the Doctor around and asking him questions as he worked on the TARDIS- he was more than happy to satisfy her curiosity, as not too many people had expressed interest in learning how the TARDIS worked.

They were interrupted, however, when Hopper called the Doctor yet again. Apparently he needed help with something involving the lab itself. So he took Rose with him and headed to Hawkins Lab. Rose

had worried about leaving El by herself, but the Doctor reassured her that the TARDIS would keep an eye on her.

Despite that, however, El let her anger, boredom, and loneliness get the better of her, and she slipped out of the TARDIS not too long after they left. She no longer cared about the risk of being seen or followed- she had to see Mike.

The Doctor and Rose, meanwhile, were with Hopper, who was getting increasingly annoyed with Sam Owens- the doctor who was now running the lab. Hopper was pointing to the marked areas on a map, which formed a circle around the laboratory.

"Grass, crops, trees. Everything in this area is either dead or dying, and that's a radius of over three miles. And it all leads back to here," he said, pointing to the lab on the map.

Doctor Owens scrutinized the map, tilting his head. "See, these patterns here are really pretty. I like the design. It's almost...psychedelic."

Both Hopper and Rose rolled their eyes at his attempt to change the subject. The former of which snapped, "This is a joke to you, huh?"

"No, it's not a joke," Owens stammered. "I just don't understand what this has to do with me or the lab, guys."

The Doctor sighed in irritation. "Isn't it obvious? The lab is at the center of it all. So whatever is causing the rot is coming from here."

"It's- that's impossible. The last burn was two days ago. It's contained."

That piqued the Doctor's curiosity. "Burn? What're you burning? What's contained?"

"That damn place, Doc. Obviously. We don't really know what it is, but it's growing and spreading. That crack or gate or whatever has gotten bigger. A lot bigger."

"Maybe there's a leak, then," Hopper interjected.

"A leak?" Owens repeated.

"I don't know, man. You're the scientist. So is he-" Hopper gestured to the Doctor- "And he figured out in less than 20 minutes that the rotten things had stuff from the other dimension in them! So-"

"I'm telling you there is nothing to worry about," Owens replied calmly, cutting Hopper off. "I just...don't see how your friend's findings could be possible. The lab isn't causing this."

"Convince us," Hopper snapped in reply.

"Convince you," Owens repeated dryly.

Hopper nodded. "Yeah. You and your egghead friends go out there to every area on this map and you run your tests, or whatever the hell it is you do, and you see if anything comes up!"

Owens sighed. "Alright, so...So you're giving me orders now?" He shook his head, laughing humorlessly. "No."

Hopper nearly growled at him, "I keep things nice and quiet for you. And you keep your shit *out of my town!*" He sighed, lowering his voice. "I've done my part, now you do yours. Convince us."

Some time later, Hopper, the Doctor, and Rose stood in one of the fields with rotted pumpkins, watching as workers from the lab gathered up soil and plant samples. Owens grimaced at the scene.

"Well, you guys were right about these pumpkins. Some nasty stuff. And the smell- gee, mother of God."

"What exactly do you think is going on?" Hopper asked impatiently.

"Well, I told you what I think," Owens replied. "But we'll run the tests, and we'll see what comes up. In the meantime, I just need you to keep the area clear for us. Shouldn't be more than a day or two."

Hopper looked at him incredulously. "What do you want me to tell people?"

Owens shrugged. "Eh, I'm sure you'll figure something out."

A few moments after Owens walked away, Hopper's radio crackled. *"Hey, Chief, you copy?"*

Hopper sighed slightly, before leaning over and speaking into the radio. "Yeah."

"*Remember that Russian girl Murray was going on about the other day? Well, now I'm beginning to think he's not so crazy after all."*

The Doctor and Rose both nearly fell over in shock upon hearing that. Had El…left? And been seen?

Hopper's eyes widened as he replied sternly, "Stay where you are. *Do not* move."

The Doctor and Rose bid goodbye to Hopper in the TARDIS doorway while El hid in the console room- she was in trouble and knew it. Once Hopper left, the Doctor focused on El, who seemed both nervous and defiant.

"What were you *thinking?*" he snapped. "I *told* you to stay here! Don't-oi, don't walk away! Where the hell did you go? Were you looking for Mike?"

El sighed, glowering at them. "He didn't see me."

"Yeah, well, that mother and her daughter did, and they called the police. Now, did anyone else see you? Anyone at all?" When she said nothing, he continued. "Come on, think! Were-"

"-Nobody saw me!" she yelled, looking genuinely angry for the first time since...ever, really. The Doctor and Rose had never seen her like that before.

The Doctor sighed, trying to tamp down his growing anger. How could she be so...reckless? "You put yourself in danger. Actually, no, you put *all* of us in danger! Think about *that*!"

El's face grew red with anger as she yelled, "You *lied*! You promised

I'd go home! And I *haven't*! I'm stuck here!"

"I didn't lie, El! Now, I'm not perfect and I admit it. But I- Rose and I- have been doing the best we can to take care of you. And all you had to do while we were here was stay hidden, and you *didn't*! Do you have any idea how dangerous-"

Rose suddenly cut him off. "Doctor, 's alright. She's just-"

The Doctor shook his head. "No, Rose, it isn't. It is not okay for El to put herself in danger like that!" Turning to El, he snapped. "Go to your room. *Now*. We'll discuss what to do with you later."

"No!" she yelled, for no other reason than to be uncooperative.

"You have *got* to learn that *actions* have *consequences*, El." Even Rose, who was slightly alarmed at just how angry the Doctor was, admitted to herself that he had a point.

"You are like Papa!"

The insult stung, but the Doctor knew it was coming from a place of blind anger rather than a valid conclusion. "Really? I'm like that psychotic-" He sighed. "Don't fight me on this, alright?! Just...go to your room!"

Turning around, El stomped up the staircase that led to the area where her room was. Even from far away, the Doctor and Rose could hear the door slamming shut. And that was when a twinge of guilt set in.

Sighing, the Doctor turned to Rose. "Do you think I was too...harsh, with her?"

Rose shrugged slightly, unsure. "I really don't know. On one hand, she's just a kid who's acting out because she's lonely- you can be surrounded by people you trust and still feel lonely. That I know. But on the other, she needs to learn to follow rules- and, like you said, that actions have consequences. Maybe you shouldn't have yelled at her so much, but...I understand why you're angry. Hell, I'm angry too, because I care about her and she put herself in danger."

The Doctor nodded. "Yes. I just *hate* seeing her so mad, or upset at all, even. She deserves to be happy."

Rose smiled. "And she'll be a lot happier in the long run if we make sure she learns the important things. Preferably without a lot of yelling in the future, but like you said, Doctor, nobody's perfect."

He grinned at her, pressing a brief kiss to her lips. "I love you, you know that? You always seem to know exactly what to say. And-"

They both jumped in fright when the phone suddenly rang shrilly. They shared a nervous laugh before the Doctor moved to answer it.

"Hel-"

He didn't have time to finish his greeting before Joyce Byers was yelling in his ear. *"Doctor, get down here! I'm in the field, just behind the middle school! Bring Rose, too. I ran to the nearest phone to call you, because there's something seriously wrong with Will!"*

"Okay, I'll be right there." With that, he hung up the phone, before turning to Rose and informing her of the situation. Seeing as El hadn't come out of her room, Rose ran up the staircase and tried the door- locked.

"El?" she called out. "The Doctor and I have to go somewhere- it's an emergency. But we'll be back as soon as we can. Okay, love?"

El said nothing, but a reassuring hum from the TARDIS told Rose that she got the message.

While the Doctor and Rose were away helping Will was when everything began to go south- both for them and Eleven. All of them discovered things that changed their course in life rapidly. And El was a key component of almost all subsequent events after they discovered Will, standing catatonic in the school field.

(A/N: *Singsong* Foreshadowing...)

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

A Shadowed Mind

(A/N: And here we begin Will the Wise! I'm sure you are all familiar with the events of this season, and due to certain things, this is the chapter when everything begins to go downhill- for the time travelers, Will, El...everyone. Nancy and Jonathan don't show up yet, but they- along with Steve and Bob- will have their role in this soon. Hope you like it!)

The Doctor and Rose ran onto the school field, finding Joyce, Dustin, Mike, Lucas, and Max all yelling Will's name.

For he was standing very still, his eyes closed and rolling back in his head. He did not seem as if he was hearing anything Joyce or the others were saying.

When Joyce was within reach of the Doctor, she grabbed onto his shoulders. "Doctor, do something! He won't wake up!" She returned her attention to her son. "Will? It's Mom! Can you hear me? Will, please just *wake up!* It's me!"

Suddenly, Will's eyes flew open, and he gasped for air.

"Will, are you okay?" Rose asked him, putting one hand on his shoulder. He nodded very, very slowly. "Yeah, I'm...fine."

Joyce sighed. "Come on, honey. Let's go home."

She led him through the school out to the front doors, where she had parked her car. As she opened the door for him and made sure he got inside safely, the children, along with the Doctor and Rose, watched on the steps.

"Okay, that totally freaked me out," Max said. "Did that not freak you guys out?"

Lucas sighed, turning to face her. "Two episodes in two days." Mike nodded, his face taking on a grave expression. "It's getting worse."

"You think it's True Sight?" Lucas asked. Max tilted her head in confusion. "What's True Sight?"

Mike gave Lucas a warning look, who shook his head at Max. "It's nothing."

Max then focused on the Doctor and Rose. "How did you know what was going on, Doc?"

"*Doctor*," he corrected. "Joyce called me- she wanted me to help her. I've...dealt with a lot of...odd things, over the years. And this is, while not the weirdest thing, definitely in the top ten. Maybe three."

Max gave him an odd look. "You know, you're really weird," she said, smirking. "I don't really know about you...Rose, was it?" When she nodded, Max kept talking. "You seem pretty normal, Rose, but your boyfriend's a weirdo."

Rose chuckled slightly, which earned her an offended look from the Doctor. "You kids...go home, or something. Just don't go after us. We're going to go check on them."

The children nodded in agreement, which prompted the Doctor and Rose to begin the trek to Joyce's house. Little did they know that Max would spend several minutes interrogating the boys regarding who they were.

When the Doctor and Rose reached her house, they did not have to knock- Joyce had left the door open for them. "I figured you would follow us," she said shakily as they stepped inside. She led them to her dining table, where Will was seated. He smiled when he noticed them. "Hi."

Rose grinned and sat down, motioning for the Doctor to do the same. "Hello, Will."

Joyce forced herself to smile, but it faded after a moment. "Will, honey, could you tell us what happened over there?"

He sighed, frowning. "I can't...remember."

"I need you to try," Joyce replied, putting her hand on top of his own.

Will closed his eyes, trying to think back. "I was on the field, and...then it all just went blank, and...and then you were there."

Joyce sighed once more, murmuring, "Will, I need you to tell me- us- the truth."

"I am," he stammered in confusion. Joyce, in turn, stood up and walked into the living room. When she came back, she had a rather large sheet of paper in her hand.

She set it down on the table in front of Will, while the Doctor and Rose leaned over to look at it. It was a rather crude drawing, but it resembled Will's highly detailed one of a shadowy creature.

"This shape, I saw it on the video tape from Halloween night," Joyce stuttered, looking first at the Doctor and Rose, then Will. "It's the same shape as your drawing, Will. These episodes that you're having, I think Dr. Owens is wrong. I think they're real. But- but we can't help you if we don't know what's going on. So, you have to talk to us. *Please*," she pleaded.

Will looked down at the drawing, averting his mother's eyes as she said, "No more secrets, okay?"

Looking back up at her, he nodded, and Joyce whispered, "Okay. Did...did you see this thing again, on the field?"

Will nodded again. "Yes," he rasped, his eyes taking on a haunted look the Doctor had seen in Eleven's eyes before.

"What is it, that...thing?" Joyce asked.

"I don't know," Will stammered, his voice becoming thick with emotion. "It's almost more like a...feeling."

The Doctor's eyes widened as Joyce asked Will slowly, "Like the one you had that night at the arcade?"

"Yes," Will rasped, tears pricking his eyes.

"What...what does it want?"

Will looked past her, making eye contact with the Doctor. "I don't know. It came for me, and..." He paused, letting out a slight sob. "And I tried. I tried to make it go away. But it got me, Mom," he choked out, tears streaming down his face.

Joyce met his gaze firmly. "Well, what...what does that mean?"

"I felt it...everywhere," he whimpered. "*Everywhere*. I- I still feel it." Collapsing into sobs, he buried his face in his mother's shoulder. "I just want this to be over."

Joyce hugged him tightly, whispering, "Hey. It's okay." Pulling away from him, she framed his face in her hands. "Listen. Look, look at me- I will never, ever let anything bad happen to you ever again. Whatever's going on in you, we're gonna fix it. I will fix it. I promise."

With that, she embraced him again, glancing worriedly at the Doctor and Rose. The latter was giving them a sympathetic look, while the former had picked up Joyce's drawing, scrutinizing it. Mentally, he was comparing the shape with what Will had drawn.

Certain pieces of the puzzle were coming together in the Doctor's mind, and if this was what he thought it was, things did not look good for them.

He said nothing of his theory immediately, however, only continued to study the shape and think about what Will had said. Joyce asked him if he and Rose were willing to stay at their house that night, to keep a close eye on Will.

They had agreed, and the Doctor reassured Joyce that they would be fine with staying on the couch, as he didn't need as much sleep as Rose did. Even she didn't sleep as much as a normal human, either.

But just before evening fell, the Doctor asked Joyce if he could use her phone. She had said yes, although she was obviously curious as to why he needed it. However, she didn't pry.

Discreetly, the Doctor dialed his own number into Joyce's wall phone. Rose stood beside him nervously, waiting to see if El would pick up- he had showed her how to use a phone, but she might not answer if she was still angry at them. Joyce and Will were in the other room, so there was a very slim chance they would be overheard.

After about half a minute, the phone went to the answering machine- she didn't pick it up. When the tone sounded, the Doctor leaned over and spoke into the receiver.

"Hi, El," he murmured. "We're gonna be back a little later than planned. There's something wrong with Will, so we're staying with his family right now, until we figure this out. Make sure you take care of yourself, and get some rest. Goodnight," he whispered, before hanging the phone back on its hook.

Rose sighed. "You think she's okay?"

The Doctor smiled slightly. "I'm sure she is. The TARDIS is a good babysitter," he joked. "Don't worry, she'll take care of Jane."

Rose nodded, but looked at the floor. "I know, but...I can't help worrying about her. 'S like an instinct."

"That's because you care. I worry about her too, for the same reason. But at the same time, I know she's alright. So, why don't you try to get some rest, love?" he murmured, still smiling at Rose. "I'll keep an eye out."

She nodded again, finally returning the smile. "Alright. And I'll do my best to stop fretting."

The next morning, Jonathan was nowhere to be found- the Doctor heard him come in late the previous night, but he must have left early. Rose was in the kitchen, making breakfast despite Joyce's telling her she didn't need to. The Doctor was still seated on the couch, half-listening as Joyce called the police station on her phone.

"Flo, it's Joyce again." A pause. "He's still not there? Listen, did he get any of my messages from yesterday? Did you give-" Another pause.

"No, no, I need Hopper. Just...tell him to call me the *second* he gets in. *Please*. Thank you." With that, she hung the phone up with a loud clang.

Then she noticed Will stumble into the living room. "Hey. How you feeling, sleepyhead? Any better?"

Will shook his head. "Uh-uh."

"Same as last night? Still...weird?" "Yeah."

When he sat down at the table, Joyce reached out, placing the back of her hand on his forehead. "Hmm. Doctor, could you come in here for a second?"

The Doctor nodded and promptly strode into the kitchen. "Yeah, what do you need?"

Joyce sighed. "Does he seem...feverish, to you?" In answer, the Doctor put his hand on Will's forehead, frowning when he detected his temperature. "No, actually. His body temperature is pretty low- do you feel cold, Will?"

Will shook his head. "No. Just a little out of it. Like I haven't really...woken up yet." Joyce opened her mouth to speak, but Will cut her off. "You promised no doctor- other than you, obviously," he said, smirking at him.

Joyce nodded. "And I meant it. No doctor. You know what? I'm gonna run you a nice bath to warm you up and hopefully get you feeling better. Okay? And when you get out, we can eat breakfast, because Rose *insisted* on cooking."

Rose grinned and chuckled at that. "I always cook, 'cos the Doctor can hardly even make toast without burning it. I tried to teach him, but that was a lost cause."

"Oi!" he shot back. "I'm not *that* bad!"

Will and Joyce both laughed softly. "You're funny," Will murmured, a strange look in his eye. Joyce helped him to his feet and walked off into the bathroom, while Will waited for her in the hallway.

A few minutes later, Will walked into the bathroom after Joyce came out and tried to call Hopper again. The Doctor and Rose sat at the kitchen table, the latter absently eating a piece of toast. The Doctor was still agonizing over the drawing, muttering to Rose about how he couldn't figure out exactly what that thing was.

"I'm sure you'll figure it out eventually," she replied, smiling at him. She wanted to say something more, but decided against it when Will came back into the room.

"Mom?" he called out. "It's too hot."

"Too hot?" Joyce repeated, frowning. She walked back into the bathroom quickly, and reappeared a moment later. "Well, I can cool it down a little bit, baby, but we've gotta get your body temp back up."

Will shook his head. "No," he said, in a voice that was uncharacteristically sharp, Rose's eyes widened and she glanced at the Doctor, who shook his head as if to say he didn't know what was going on.

Joyce, meanwhile, tilted her head in confusion. "No?"

The haunted, shadowy look returned to Will's eyes. "He likes it cold," he said, his words like ice. Then he turned around and walked back in the direction of his bedroom.

The Doctor was almost completely certain of what the "living shadow" was, but needed to be sure- he almost *wanted* to be wrong, because this was one of those rare times where being right would also mean being the bearer of *very* bad news.

Joyce, in turn, started opening doors and windows. When the Doctor and Rose gave her looks of alarm, she said, "What? I want him to be comfortable."

Unable to argue with her, the Doctor resigned himself to staring at the plate of food Rose suddenly set down in front of him. "Here, you'll feel better once you eat."

A few minutes later, Hopper finally arrived. Tapping on the front door- which was now ajar- he called out, "Hello?"

From the back of her house, Joyce shouted, "Leave it open."

She stomped back into the living room just as Hopper greeted the Doctor and Rose. Joyce pulled a cigarette away from her mouth and hissed, "Where the hell have you been?"

Hopper replied haltingly, "I...overslept; what the hell's going on? It's freezing."

Joyce beckoned for him to follow her, along with the Doctor and Rose. She walked down the hallway that led to Will's bedroom door. Tapping on it lightly, she opened it and whispered, "Hey! Knock-knock. We have another visitor."

Will didn't turn around right away- he was seated on his bed, in front of an open window. Rose's eyes widened in alarm when she saw he wasn't wearing a shirt. "Will, are you okay?"

When he turned around, Will nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine. Hey, Hopper."

Not long after, all five of them were analyzing both drawings. Hopper said, "So this, this shadow thing. You told your mom it *likes* it like this? He likes it cold?"

When Will nodded, the Doctor asked him, very slowly, "How...do you know that?"

He shrugged. "I just...know."

"Does he...talk to you?" the Doctor replied, his concern growing.

Will shook his head. "No. It's like...I don't have to think. I just *know* things now. Things I never did before."

"Like what?"

"It's hard to explain." Will sighed. "It's like...old memories in the back of my head, only...they're not my memories. I mean, I don't think they're old memories at all. They're...they're now-memories,

happening all at once, *now*."

The Doctor paled significantly at that. "Can you describe what you're seeing?"

Will sighed again. "I don't know, it's...hard to explain."

"I know, but...can you just try? For us?" Joyce interjected.

He sniffled. "It's like...it's like they're growing and...and spreading. Killing."

"The...the memories?" Joyce asked.

"I don't know," Will whimpered. "I'm sorry." He buried his face in his mother's shoulder, crying.

"Hey. Hey, it's okay, sweetie." Suddenly, she fixed her gaze on the wall- something had gotten her attention. "Sweetie?" she murmured, pulling back. "What if you didn't have to use words?"

A minute or so later, Will sat down at his desk, scribbling madly on paper with his crayons. His drawings made no sense- they were just a jumble of colors.

Meanwhile, El was trying to amuse herself in the TARDIS, as well as take her mind off things. And that was how she discovered something very odd indeed- a newspaper clipping, underneath a stack of books in the library. The photo on the front was of a woman- she had lost her daughter.

Immediately, El knew what to do. And her resulting attempt to reach the woman left her kneeling on the floor, screaming and crying out to the woman she knew was her mother. "*Mama!*"

At Joyce's house, the Doctor, Rose, and Hopper- along with her- were all trying to make sense of what Will was drawing. "It's nothing, just scribbles," Hopper said, as he looked at the stack of paper Joyce had given him.

"Hey, wait a minute," the Doctor said suddenly. "I think these images connect. Like a- like a puzzle, or a map."

Immediately, everyone scrambled to connect the pieces- while Will kept drawing even more.

Before long, nearly all of the flooring in the house had been covered in paper, and the adults had stepped back to analyze it.

"Does this mean anything to you?" Hopper asked, looking at Joyce.

She shook her head. "No. I mean, is it some sort of maze, or...a road? And it's sort of forking and branching, like lightning."

"You think it's that storm?"

"No, that was completely different. He used red. This is all blue and some weird...dirt color. It-"

"-Wait!" the Doctor shouted, cutting her off. "I need everyone to be quiet."

Joyce stammered, "Why? Do you hear something, or-"

"-Stop talking. Brain thinking. Shut up," he snapped. Rose gave him a disapproving glare, but said nothing.

Joyce, however, was not satisfied. "I don't know who you've been running around with, but you are not telling me to *shut up*," she shot back, before changing the subject back to the drawings. "It might be roots. He said it was growing and spreading, and..."

"-Killing," the Doctor said suddenly, grinning despite the situation. "Oh, Joyce, you are *brilliant*!" he exclaimed.

Then his face fell. "Although, this might be bad news. It's not a maze or a road or even roots, it's *tunnels*! The...now-memories, as he called them, are part of a hive mind! I should've known, my own bloody *species* had a hive mind and I didn't recognize the signs sooner!" He spun around in a circle, looking at the floor. As he spoke, he kept pacing and moving his hands around.

"Well, now I feel like an idiot. But anyway, there's a hive mind, and...Will is connected to it. When he said the creature...got him, I think it established a telepathic link with him. But how- he's human, telepathy can kill humans if proper precautions aren't taken, and I've *seen* that shadow before, *what* is it?!"

Suddenly, he gasped in realization, and his face became very grave indeed. "The Umbra," he whispered, eyes widening in shock. "It's supposedly been dead for centuries, but now it's...back. This is *not* good. This is *not good, at all.* If we're not quick or careful, the universe itself could come to an end."

(A/N: DUN DUN DUNNNNNNNNNN! And yes, "Umbra" is the Latin word for "shadow". It seemed the obvious choice, as the Mind Flayer is, quite literally, a living shadow. Also, it's time for you to hang onto your seats, folks- we've got a big storm coming.)

7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Tunnels and Travels

(A/N: I know this took awhile, but I was hit with inspiration on other things [original novel, X-Files/Doctor Who crossover fic], combined with writer's block for this. Sorry about that. But I hope you enjoy the chapter.)

Joyce and Rose both paled significantly at the Doctor's words. The former stammered in confusion, "What- what do you mean by...the universe? And what exactly is the...Umbra?"

The Doctor let out a sigh and looked at the floor. "Well, the Umbra is what the Time Lords called that creature. I didn't recognize it at first because I'd only ever seen images of it- it was supposedly dead by the time I came along. No one really knows what it is or where it came from- just that it wants to control and destroy everything. It believes it's...superior to everything else."

Looking back up, he continued, "Much like the Daleks, a ruthless race that were the reason behind my people's unfortunate demise. But the Umbra is much more dangerous, due to it being one of the few creatures that is a far stronger telepath than a Time Lord. It is capable of enslaving someone or something through their mind, and using that being to further its own sick goals. And I believe it's capable of manipulating nonliving matter as well. It's probably behind the growth of the parallel dimension- the rift probably gave it energy to feed off of, granting it power and control. The Time Lords must've trapped it in there- I don't remember all of the details, but apparently they had one hell of a job trying to contain it. Now that it's free...we need to act fast."

Joyce stuttered, "So...you're telling me...that that *thing*...is after my boy? And it took *control* of him?"

"I don't know, Joyce. At least, I don't know what its intentions are. When it comes to Will, anyway. Most likely, it's trying to see through his eyes."

Hopper suddenly got to his feet. "Wait a second. You said he was drawing tunnels." He paused, thinking for a moment. "Doc, I need you to come with me. Rose, you can stay. We'll be back soon, I just need to show him something."

The Doctor tilted his head in confusion. "What exactly is this about, Hopper? And there's *no way* I'm leaving Rose behind!"

Hopper rolled his eyes. "Look, Doc, I think I know where those damn tunnels are. Now will you come with me so I can show you?"

Stunned by Hopper's words, he nodded silently. "Alright."

Not long after they left, there was a knock at the door. Joyce stepped outside to answer it when she saw who it was- Mike. Rose could hear bits of their conversation through the door, and was rather surprised when she heard Mike ask, "It's about the shadow monster, isn't it?"

Meanwhile, the Doctor and Hopper were back at the farm the scientists from Hawkins Lab had taken samples from. "I think the tunnels are way down underground- part of that other dimension. Which is why I brought this," he explained, holding out the shovel he was carrying.

The Doctor's eyes widened. "You're just going to dig down until you find something? No. No, no, no, no, no. I know a much quicker way to handle this."

Once they reached the center of the field, the Doctor said, "Stand back," before fiddling with the buttons on his sonic and pointing it at the ground.

A few moments later, a crack appeared, and all the nearby soil moved, and suddenly he was standing at the edge of a small hole that was at least five feet deep. "There! That should save us all some time," he said brightly. "*Now* you can use the shovel."

And it did save them a lot of time- it only took three tries for the shovel to hit something that was obviously not dirt.

They were tipped off when they heard an odd squelching sound, followed by the sound of escaping air. A few more strikes of the shovel revealed an odd gray-green surface that almost looked slimy. "That's not good," the Doctor murmured as Hopper continued to hit the surface with the blade of the shovel.

Before long, there was a hole that was large enough for a person to go through. The Doctor went through it first, and was given quite the shock when he saw just where they were.

"It's like the parallel dimension," he murmured, stepping out of the way as Hopper climbed down. As the police chief got an eyeful of the tunnel they were in, he groaned. "Oh, Jesus."

The Doctor ignored him, instead opting to explain why the vegetation had died. "It's spread beneath the soil, and it's toxic. *That's* why all the crops died," he exclaimed. His face turned serious, however, as he said, "Well, I solved one mystery, but discovered a much bigger problem."

Hopper nodded. "Yeah, I'm with you, Doc. Come on, let's go this way," he replied, motioning to the right with his hand and grabbing hold of his flashlight. "Watch your back."

"I'm gonna regret this," he mumbled, and followed Hopper.

After what felt like several hours, the Doctor and Hopper were preparing to head back when they ran into trouble.

It started when they came across an area their tunnel led to- a sort of room, with several pathways branching off of it. There were bones and what seemed to be roots on the ground, the former something the Doctor found to be very disconcerting.

Later, they were in a forked tunnel, where Hopper's curiosity was piqued by a strange bump on the tunnel wall. Subsequently, he pointed the flashlight at it.

A moment later, his face had been sprayed with some sort of liquid,

and he stumbled backwards, clearly dizzy. Before the Doctor could do anything, Hopper was hit with another burst of liquid in a different spot. Suddenly, Hopper lost consciousness.

"Hopper! What the-" the Doctor yelled. He shook the other man's shoulder, but he did not wake. "Oh, this is bad," he muttered.

Back at Joyce's house, several hours had indeed passed. Joyce was currently trying to connect the last of the drawings Will had made, while Mike and Rose were tending to him- Will was seated on his bed next to Rose, describing his connection to the Umbra- though he simply called it the 'shadow monster' around Mike.

"It's like...it's like I feel what the shadow monster's feeling. See what he's seeing."

From across the room, Mike tilted his head and asked, "Like in the Upside Down?"

Will nodded. "Some of him is there. But some of him is here, too," he said darkly, and Rose sighed, squeezing his hand in comfort. "What do you mean by that, Will? D'you mean here, as in...this house, or..."

"In this house, and...in *me*," he choked out. "It's like...it's like he's reaching into Hawkins, more and more. And the more he spreads, the more...connected to him I feel."

Mike's eyes widened in realization as he too sat down beside Will. "And the more you see these now-memories," he murmured.

Will nodded again, tightening his grip on Rose's hand. "At first I just...felt it, in the back of my head. I didn't even really know it was there. It's like when you have a dream; and you can't remember it unless you think really hard." He paused, clearing his throat. "It was like that. But now it's like...Now I remember. I remember all the time."

Mike said slowly, "Maybe...maybe that's good."

Will turned his head and asked incredulously, "Good?" while Rose gave Mike a similar look.

Unperturbed, Mike said, "Just think about it, Will. You're like a spy now. A superspy. Spying on the shadow monster."

Rose raised an eyebrow, nodding slowly as she caught on to what Mike was getting at. "If you know what he's seeing and feeling-"

"-Maybe that's how we can stop him," Mike finished for her. "Maybe all of this is happening for a reason."

"Y-You really think so?" Will stammered, and Mike nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I really do."

A silence fell for a few moments, but Rose broke it. "Problem is, the monster seems to be clever. What if it- or he- figures out we're spying? What if he tries to do the same thing to us?"

"He won't," Mike replied firmly, shaking his head.

Will's voice shook as he asked, "How do you know?"

In turn, Mike grabbed onto Will's free hand. "We won't let him."

When the Doctor and Hopper failed to come back that night, everyone began to worry. Rose was unable to sleep at all because of it. But in the morning, a startling declaration made her worries intensify even more.

She was sitting on the living room floor with Joyce, analyzing the tunnel drawings, when a pale, sweating Will raced into the living room.

"Mom! Rose," he called out. "I saw them."

Joyce furrowed her brow in confusion, while Rose's eyes widened in alarm. The former asked, "Who? You saw...who, baby?"

"Hopper. The Doctor," he rasped. "I think they're in trouble. I think they're going to die."

Meanwhile, El was in the passenger seat of a large truck, that a friendly man had allowed her to ride in. The trip had been a bit long,

but would be worth it. "Alright. I think this is it. Five-one-five Larrabee, right?"

El nodded. "Yes. Five-fifteen."

The man chuckled. "Right. 'Five-fifteen', sure."

Turning to the side, El opened the door, saying "Thank you" in lieu of a goodbye.

Before she could exit the truck, however, the driver stopped her. "Hey," he said gently. "You apologize to your mama, yeah? Huh? Must be scared half to death." With a sigh, he asked, "How long's it been?"

"Long time," she replied, jumping out of the truck and slamming the door behind her.

Once the man in the truck drove off, El started up the cobblestone path to her mother's house.

Her *mother's*.

This was the woman she had been told would have loved her. And she hadn't been dead- the Doctor had lied. This was where she needed to be.

Standing on the front porch, El knocked on the door. When no one answered, she struck it with her hand again.

This time, a loud shout could be heard- a woman, but not her mother. "Go away! I'm not interested!"

Unable to think of anything else to do, El hit the door repeatedly until the woman answered it. Her face could barely be seen through the gap in the door as she snapped, "Look, I don't want your Thin Mints, alright, kid?"

"Thin Mints?" she repeated, confused, and the woman rolled her eyes.

"Or your religious mumbo-jumbo. Whatever you're selling, I ain't buying. Okay?" With that, she slammed the door shut.

El knew then that she was out of options. So she did what she had done several hours ago; in order to leave the TARDIS- unlocked the door using her mind.

After that, the door flew open to reveal the woman, standing at the end of the hallway, looking both shocked and confused. Before she could do anything, El said to her, "I want to see Mama."

After some explanation, the woman numbly led her into the living room. Inside it was a scene identical to the one Joyce, Hopper, the Doctor, and Rose had witnessed- although El was unaware of that.

Her mother sat in a rocking chair, keeping her eyes fixed on the television. She kept repeating the same words; somewhat incoherently.

"Mama?" El murmured, moving closer to her."Mama? Can you hear me?"

Terry Ives did nothing to indicate that she could, not even looking at her.

El was not deterred, however. Rather, she crouched down in front of her. "Mama, it's me. Jane," she whispered, placing her hand on top of her mother's. "I'm here now."

Terry finally looked directly at her, with brown eyes that matched her own. But she still said nothing, other than the words she kept repeating. "Breathe. Sunflower. Rainbow. Four-fifty..."

Turning around, El faced the other woman. "What's wrong with Mama?"

In some ways, though, she didn't need to ask- as she was beginning to understand what the Doctor meant when he told her that her mother was 'more or less' dead.

That was probably why, when asked that question, the woman- that she would later come to know was her aunt- began to cry.

Will sat hunched over his desk, drawing an image of another tunnel.

Once he was done, Joyce asked, "Hey, is this where you saw him? Is this where you saw Hopper and the Doctor?"

Will nodded. "I think so, yeah."

"Okay," Joyce murmured, picking up the drawing. She, Mike, and Rose walked through the house, trying to find the matching image. After a minute, Mike yelled, "Here!", pointing to a spot on the fridge.

Joyce and Rose immediately ran over, the former holding the drawing against the matching one. "Okay, so...the Doctor and Hopper are in here," she said quickly.

"Yeah. So now we just need to find out where 'here' is, right?" Mike asked, and Joyce nodded in agreement. "Right."

"Did they say anything? I mean, before they left?" Mike asked.

Rose nodded slowly. "They both said things about tunnels, and...the Doctor talked about...a hive mind, and he called the creature...the Umbra. Said it was trying to take over the universe. An'-"

She was cut off by the sound of a car approaching.

"Hopper," Joyce said breathlessly, running with Mike and Rose to look out the front window.

However, it wasn't Hopper's car that was arriving- rather, it was Bob's. "I'd better get rid of him- nicely," Joyce murmured. "Hold on, I'll be right back."

Quickly, she all but ran out of the front door.

A few minutes later, things hadn't gone the way Rose had expected- along with everyone else, Bob was standing in the living room, eyeing the tunnels. "Huh." Turning to Will, he asked, "You drew all these yourself?" and Joyce nodded.

He tilted his head in confusion. "Why, exactly?"

Joyce gave him a stern look. "I told you the rules. No questions,

okay?" She and Rose started to walk away as she continued, "We...we just...need you to help us figure out what-"

She stopped walking when she realized Bob wasn't paying attention. "Bob? Bob! Over here!"

She beckoned him over to the kitchen. Quickly, she scribbled a red X into the right image. "-Where this is," she concluded, while Rose and Mike both nodded.

"That's the objective. Find the X," the latter said.

Bob smirked. "Yeah? What's at the X? Pirate treasure?" he joked, chuckling. Joyce, however, didn't play along- simply gave him a stern look. "Bob, no questions."

"Okay," he murmured. He sighed and clicked his tongue, before putting his arm around Joyce. "Lemme talk to you for a second. Hang on, guys," he said, leading Joyce into another room.

Mike, Will, and Rose stayed in the kitchen, seated at the table. Rose, due to having heightened senses, could hear bits of their conversation- even though she didn't really mean to.

"*Joyce, Will doesn't look well.* You *don't look well. What's going on?"*

"*Nothing! Nothing."*

"*Is this an episode? Is this one of Will's episodes?"*

"*No, no! No."*

"*I'm sorry, I just...I don't see how any of this is good for Will. Or for you. I mean, two days ago these* people *who say they're friends with you- that I've never even* heard of- *just show up, and now..." He sighed. "Joyce, I don't understand what's going on. And even if I wanted to play along with whatever this is, how can I figure anything out if I don't understand the context of the game?"*

Suddenly, there was silence. *"Wait. I know that shape. That's Lovers' Lake."*

Bob exited the room, chuckling slightly. "It's Lovers' Lake. I *get* it. Okay, that's Lake Jordan. And if that's Lake Jordan, you can probably find...yeah, that's, uh...Sattler's quarry," he said quickly, attracting the attention of the other three people in the house. "And if you just follow it naturally...it moves to...the Eno River," he concluded. "That's the Eno, do you see it?"

Rose nearly ran over to him, Mike and Will behind her; as he continued to speak and walk around the house. "Okay, so, the lines aren't roads. But they *act* like roads. And they act like roads 'cause when you follow 'em, you'll see-"

"-That they avoid bodies of water," Rose interrupted, finishing his sentence. "Of course they don't go over water, they're *underground*! These are the tunnels that Hopper was talking about! This is all underground! Bob, that's brilliant!"

Bob nodded slowly, clearly pleased with the fact that she had figured it out. "Yeah, exactly. That's the giveaway! Ha! It's not a puzzle, it's a *map*. It's a *map* of *Hawkins*." Then he stopped, tilting his head. "Wait, Hopper? And what do you mean, underground?"

"No questions," both women immediately said in unison.

Meanwhile, the Doctor and Hopper were trying to make contact with the outside world via his radio- but so far, they had only been met with static. Hopper had regained consciousness about an hour before, but things were even worse, seeing as they were very, *very* lost.

Currently, they were observing another "room" of sorts, this one also lined with bones and a few remnants of carcasses. "This does not look good, Hopper," the Doctor murmured.

Hopper ignored him, walking over to the tunnel wall. "Look at this, Doc," he said, beckoning him over.

When the Doctor was standing beside him, Hopper whispered, "Look. The flame- it's like the tunnel's scared of it."

That was an apt explanation, for whenever Hopper held his cigarette

lighter close to the tunnel wall, it made an odd screeching sound and moved away from it.

"I have an idea," Hopper said suddenly. Without further ado, he swiftly grabbed hold of a very large bone, separating it from a few others with a sickening crack. Then he removed his jacket, lighting it on fire after wrapping it around the bone. "There," he said with a grunt.

"A...torch? Nice." Hopper rolled his eyes at the interested look on the Doctor's face. "Quit acting like everything is fascinating," he snapped.

The Doctor raised an eyebrow at that. "I'm just surprised at how quickly you thought of that, is all."

"Let's have this argument later and just try to get out of here," Hopper replied, groaning. The Doctor simply shrugged. "Fine with me."

Hopper then pointed the torch at the tunnel wall- the vinelike boundary screeched again, louder. He moved it around enough to form a small circular gap.

"Here, hold this," he said abruptly, passing the torch to the Doctor. "Don't burn yourself."

Hopper turned around and dug his hands into the tunnel wall, trying to see what was behind it.

The Doctor sighed when he realized what Hopper was trying to do. "I don't think that's going to work."

"Please shut your mouth, brainiac; I'm trying to get us out of here."

Elsewhere, El- or Jane, to her mother- was seated at the kitchen table in the house where her mother and aunt lived.

Said aunt- Becky- was currently trying to process everything that had happened. "I just need a little help understanding, sweetie, okay? Can you tell me where you came from? Where you've been all this time?"

El said nothing, only looked over in the direction of her mother.

Becky continued, "A policeman, a couple of women, and a...doctor, I think, came looking for you last year. Did they find you?"

Rather than answer Becky's question, El asked a different one- she didn't want to talk about the life she had run away from. "She won't get better...will she?"

Becky sighed. "They don't think so, no." She paused, sniffling. "But she's not in any pain. She's just...stuck, they think. Like in a dream. A long dream."

"A good dream?" El asked, her voice thick with emotion, she turned to look at Becky. In response, her aunt gave her a sympathetic look. "I hope so."

El sighed and looked back over at her mother. "Is it the same dream?"

"We don't know. Sometimes she says different words. But usually those."

El let out a shuddering breath at that, tears pricking the back of her eyes. When she noticed her distress, Becky leaned forward and put her hand on top of El's. "She always believed that you were out there. She always believed that you'd come home one day."

That was when El realized something. No matter what the Doctor had lied about- namely her mother's death, in a way- he had been truthful when he told El that her mother loved her very much.

El turned her head to look at Becky once more. "Home?" she asked, sniffling.

Becky nodded and gave her a tiny smile. "Yeah, home," she whispered, on the verge of sobbing herself.

That show of emotion was enough for El's guilt at leaving the Doctor and Rose to fade away- at least for the time being. She took her aunt's hand, smiling at her. Maybe, just maybe, this could be her real home.

(A/N: Chapter is LONG- at least, longer than some of my usual work. Would've probably been over 4,000 words had I not cut it

off here. Anyway, hope you enjoyed, and leave a review- that's my motivation! :D)

8. Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Memories and a Monster

Eleven- or rather, *Jane*, stood beside the crib her mother had kept for so long- all because she believed her daughter to be alive, despite the fact that there was almost no proof of that.

It was enough to make Jane sniff slightly as she picked up the stuffed bear that lay in the crib. "Pretty," she whispered.

Becky sighed. "I can get you a real bed, and you can stay here with me, if you want. How's that sound?"

Jane nodded in assent, but said nothing. Her aunt murmured, "I want to help you, but to really do that, I need you to talk to me, okay? Doesn't have to be now. Doesn't have to be today. But when you're ready." Still she stayed silent. "Okay?"

Finally, Jane turned to look at Becky and nodded again. "Okay."

Something about that reminded her of her previous guardians- Rose in particular. They never made her talk if she didn't want to, but still tried to understand what she had gone through. That reminder caused a feeling that she couldn't name to come over her- not guilt, not pain. Something very different.

Then her attention was stolen by the sudden flickering of the lamp mounted on the hallway wall. Tilting her head in curiosity, Jane moved closer to it. Becky trailed after her, saying, "Oh, yeah, that. That happens sometimes. Old house, bad wiring..."

She paused, and the nearest wall lamp also flickered. Jane walked over to it as Becky kept speaking. "Or if you ask my crazy aunt Shirley, it's...haunted," she said slowly, looking over to where Jane had gone.

The lights kept flickering, and Jane followed them. Her aunt also

followed *her*, once she had gotten over her confusion as to what Jane was doing. They walked down the stairs, Jane finally coming to a stop as the lamp on the kitchen counter flickered, and Becky sighed again. "Sweetie, really, it's just the wiring."

Jane shook her head. "No."

Turning to the side, she faced the room where her mother sat, and the lamp nearest to her flickered. Glancing back at her aunt, Jane walked into the living room, crouching down beside her mother. "It's Mama," she rasped.

As Jane suspected, Terry's nose was bleeding. Reaching out, she wiped it away with her index finger. Becky stammered, "I-I don't understand."

"She knows I'm here," Jane murmured in reply.

As if on cue, the TV channels began to change rapidly, almost of their own accord. Jane stood up and walked over to it, stopping about six inches away from it.

"She wants to talk."

"I would say that the X is...I don't know, maybe half a mile southeast of Danford?" Bob said uncertainly, and Joyce laughed. "Thank you!"

She had been working with Rose, Bob, Mike, and Will to "scale down" Will's map, in order to find Hopper and the Doctor's precise location. Joyce repeated her previous words, kissed Bob on the cheek, grabbed the map, and ran for the door. Rose, Will, and Mike followed her.

"What, are we-" Bob stammered. "Are we really going?"

When he got no reply, Bob sighed and stood up, walking after them.

Within the dark maze of tunnels, Hopper was grunting in effort as he attempted to crawl through the hole he'd made in the tunnel wall. "I *really* don't think that's going to work, Hopper," the Doctor called out behind him. "I *would* try to use the sonic, but something down here

has jammed the frequencies."

Hopper groaned in frustration and moved backwards, leaning against the tunnel wall. Panting, he rasped, "Stop talking, smartass. I-"

He stopped talking when a round of hacking coughs overtook him. The Doctor's eyes widened in concern and he bent down beside him. "You okay? You're not gonna be sick, are you?"

Hopper ignored him, reached into his pocket, and grabbed a carton of cigarettes. He removed one, then held it out in the Doctor's direction. "Want one?"

"No thanks. And I don't see how inhaling smoke is going to help you deal with your cough-"

"-And cigarettes will kill you, yada yada. Please, just...stop talking. I need to think."

The Doctor fell silent, only speaking up when he heard a strange squelching sound. "Uh, Hopper? Do you hear that-"

Before he could finish asking his question, a vinelike tendril began winding around Hopper's leg, followed by several more slithering closer. "Son of a bitch!" he yelled, standing up. He managed to cut some away with his knife, and the Doctor tried to remove some with his hands, but the vines were too great in number.

Yelling, Hopper fell backwards. "No, no. Wait! Hey!" He started to choke and gasp for breath as the tendrils wound around his neck.

The Doctor crouched down on the tunnel floor, doing his best to remove the vines. But before long, they started wrapping around his own hands, wrists, and legs, rendering him immobile. "Oh, now *this* is very, *very* bad!" he shouted.

On solid ground, muffled screaming and yelling would be heard- if anyone was around to hear.

Elsewhere, in the back room of an arcade, a frustrated Lucas was trying to tell Max the truth- but she was having none of it. "It's *kinda*

funny. Stupid, but funny." Standing up, she headed for the door.

"Hey, where are you going?" Lucas stammered.

She shrugged. "Story time's over, isn't it?" With that, she opened the door and stormed out.

As Max headed for the exit, Lucas trailed after her. "What's wrong with you? I gave you what you wanted," he said, frustrated.

"I *wanted* to be part of the group, not a part of some joke," she shot back, glaring at him.

Lucas sighed, his voice insistent. "It's *not* a joke."

"You did a good job, okay?" she replied, a mocking smile on her face. "You can go tell the others I believed your lies if it gets you experience points or whatever." Max rolled her eyes and turned around, walking away from him.

After a few feet, however, Lucas rushed forward and grabbed her arm. "We have a lot of rules in our party, but the most important is, 'Friends don't lie'. Never, ever. No matter what."

"Is that right?" she asked, glaring. Max stomped over to an arcade machine and snapped, "Then how do you explain *this*?"

She pulled off the *Out of Order* sign that was taped to the machine- it worked perfectly.

Lucas sighed. "I had to do that. To protect you."

"To protect me from who, exactly?" she demanded. Raising her voice, Max continued, "The big bad government baddies from Hawkins Lab?"

"Lower your voice," Lucas hissed.

"Or maybe it was to protect me from the Shadow-Walker from another dimension," she said, louder. "Or maybe the Doctor, who's supposedly a 1200 year old alien. And his girlfriend, who's apparently *immortal*."

"Max, I'm serious, shut up!"

"Oh, no, no, no, no! You know what it was? It was *Eleven*. The girl- mmf!"

Lucas had moved forward, covering her mouth with his hand in a moment of blind instinct. "Stop talking," he murmured, his voice and eyes grave. "You're going to get us killed. Do you understand?"

Max's eyes widened, and she grabbed his wrist, pulling his hand away from her face. "You're serious?" she whispered.

"I really wish I wasn't."

Max scrutinized him, sighing. "Prove it," she said finally.

He gave her an odd look. "I can't. Well, I can prove that the Doctor's an alien, but that might take a while."

"So...what, I'm supposed to just *trust* you until then?" she argued, and Lucas nodded. "Yes."

Suddenly, the sound of a revving engine made Max jump up. She ran for the front door of the arcade, where her brother's car sat waiting. "Shit! I gotta go," she swore. "Um..."

Max grabbed Lucas' hand, unsure of what else to do. "Don't follow me out. Okay?"

As she ran out, Lucas shouted, "Do you believe me?" but there was no reply.

Even as Billy antagonized Max and she gave him short, snappish- but careful- answers, her mind was elsewhere.

So that Doctor guy is an alien, she mused. *Weird*.

Jane sat down on the floor of her mother's living room, a static-filled TV behind her. She secured a strip of cloth over her eyes as Becky asked, "It's okay if I sit here, right?"

"Yes."

"A-And I won't...mess it up, or anything?" Becky stammered.

Jane shrugged. "No," she replied, as if that was the most obvious answer in the world. Her aunt sighed and said, "If you...talk to Terry, will you tell her that I love her very much? And that I'm sorry I didn't believe-"

"-Stop talking," Jane said sharply, cutting her off. As Becky murmured, "Okay, sorry", the slightest twinge of guilt came back to Jane. Telling others to stop talking in order to concentrate was something that she had picked up from the Doctor.

She forced herself to stop thinking about that, however, and reached out to her mother.

Before long, she could see Terry in the dark "room" she entered when blindfolded. Jane moved closer to her mother, who was still sitting in her rocking chair and repeating the same words.

"Mama?" she called out softly. "Mama, it's me. Jane. I'm here now." Jane paused, before saying, "I'm home."

"No," her mother said suddenly, grabbing her wrist. And then she was gone.

Within a minute, Jane was drawn into a series of her mother's memories: bleeding on the floor of a house, waking up in a hospital and insisting that Brenner had taken her daughter. Which, of course, he had. Then she saw her mother crouched down, opening a safe. Inside it was what Jane knew to be a gun. Something the Doctor hated.

She didn't dwell on that reminder, though, as another memory unfolded. Her mother went into Hawkins Lab, and shot a guard when stopped. As the alarm blared, Terry ran down hallways and opened doors, calling out for her daughter. Her attention was drawn to a door with a rainbow painted on it, and she went inside.

The memory shifted, allowing Jane to get a glimpse of herself, along with another girl. She saw her mother try to reach her, only to get

dragged away by security guards.

Jane saw her mother strapped to a table, screaming. She was held down and hurt by some sort of machine, before losing consciousness.

And then words and images began to appear in a loop: Becky telling her sister to breathe, the vase of sunflowers in her hospital room, the safe combination, the rainbow painted on the door, and Brenner's instruction, "four-fifty".

She jolted from her psychic state, gasping as Becky wrapped her arms around her in comfort and blood dripped from her nose.

Joyce, Bob, Rose, Mike, and Will were all crammed into Bob's car as they drove down the road. Joyce was yelling at him, trying to figure out what to do. Will interrupted them, however, when he blurted out, "Turn right."

"What?" Joyce gasped out, and Rose exclaimed, "You heard 'im. Turn right!"

Will nodded. "I saw them. In my now-memories."

"In your *what*?" Bob asked, as Joyce nodded and swung a sharp right. Everyone yelled as the car nearly barreled into Hopper's, but Joyce slammed the brakes before hitting it.

"What's Jim doing here?" Bob wondered aloud, as Joyce and Rose both got out of the car. "Boys, I need you to stay here," the former instructed.

"No, Mom, it's not safe," Will protested, and Rose said, "Yes, that's exactly why you should stay here," before slamming the door shut.

Bob trailed after them as Joyce yelled Hopper's name and Rose called out to the Doctor. As they made their way closer to the large hole in the ground, Bob started talking. "Hey, be careful, guys," he exclaimed. "Just going down the hole."

Joyce froze when she saw the writing mass that sealed a gap in the ground, whispering, "Tunnels. Underground." Turning to Bob, she

ordered, "Give me that," pointing at a shovel that lay near his feet. "What, the shovel?"

"Yes, the shovel!" she yelled, holding out her hand. She struck the spot in the ground, nearly recoiling when a thick liquid sprayed her and Rose. Turning around, she got out, "I need you to help us get down there."

Bob looked very confused and a bit frightened. "What are you talking about? Joyce-"

"Bob! *Now*!"

Before long, Joyce was being lowered into the tunnel, Rose just in front of her. Immediately, they both started running, calling out. Joyce turned back, though, when Bob dropped down after them.

Rose kept on moving, deaf to Bob's rambling about Will's map of tunnels. "*Doctor*! Hopper! Oh, where the bloody hell *are* you?!"

When Joyce and Bob caught up with her, the former found a cigarette laying on the ground. "It's Hopper's, they've gotta be this way," she stammered. Rose and Bob nodded obediently, letting her lead the way.

A few minutes later, they came to a cavernous room, lined with bones. On the ground, Rose saw an extinguished torch, Hopper's hat and flashlight, along with-

"Oh my God, that's the Doctor's sonic screwdriver!" Rose yelled, crouching down to grab it. A muffled yell a few feet away got her attention. "Doctor!"

Th next minute or so was tense and frenzied, as Rose, Joyce, and Bob worked to free the Doctor and Hopper from being trapped by the sentient vines. When they were both freed, Joyce embraced Hopper, asking him if he was okay.

Rose paid no mind to this as she hugged the Doctor tightly, sobbing out of fear and relief. "Oh, thank God you're alright," she whimpered. "I was so worried about you!"

"Rose, I am *so* sorry," he murmured. "I never meant to-"

He was cut off when she kissed him fiercely, flinging her arms around his neck as he wrapped his arms around her waist. She only pulled away when Hopper cleared his throat sharply.

"Oh, for the love of- do that later, okay?" he snapped, groaning. Rose laughed in embarrassment and apologized, but the Doctor said nothing- only looked slightly uncomfortable.

Suddenly, a man in a Hazmat suit burst in. "Get out of here! Clear the area!" Everyone except Hopper immediately nodded and took off, while he made a grab for his hat before leaving.

Once everyone had gotten safely above ground, the Doctor realized what was going on- a team from Hawkins Lab was trying to light the tunnels on fire. He understood why, but the hive mind…

"Hey, wait! Don't!" he protested, making a dive for the hole, but was held back by two guards. He continued to yell as a rush of air that signified flames springing up could be heard.

They released his hold on him, however, when a loud shout from Will made them turn around. The Doctor could only watch in horror as Will let out otherworldly, pained shrieks.

(A/N: And we have reached the end of Dig Dug! That ending scene was so terrifying when I first watched it; I thought I was gonna have nightmares. I think it freaked my dad out more, though.)

9. Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Mind and Heart

The scene was one of complete chaos: Will on a stretcher in Hawkins Lab screaming his head off in pain, with concerned adults running behind him. In another room, the Doctor was arguing with the scientists about being decontaminated and the hive mind's connection to Will.

Rose was behind the stretcher with everyone else, doing her best to comfort Will as the various ER doctors rushed over to examine him. Eventually, it became clear that the only thing they could do to help was sedate him. Rose hugged Joyce tightly as both women sobbed.

Some time later, as Will lay unconscious in a hospital bed, Rose kept watch over him while the Doctor and Joyce tried to explain what had happened to Doctor Owens and a roomful of scientists. "That...thing, it did something to him," Joyce said.

Considering the current situation, Doctor Owens' calm was remarkable and somewhat infuriating- especially to the Doctor. He cleared his throat and replied, "Okay. And these now-memories, as you call them, how long has he been experiencing them?"

"I told you, since Thursday. Since I found him in the field."

"And why wasn't he brought in?" another scientist piped up. Joyce, in turn, sighed in frustration. "I *have* been bringing him in, and what have you done? Nothing. *Nothing*!"

Doctor Owens held up his hands and said calmly, "These are new symptoms, Joyce."

"No. No, he has been telling you over and over that something's wrong, and you said it was *all* in his head. You said 'be patient'.

Those were *your* words!" Joyce shouted, pointing a finger at him accusingly. The Doctor nodded in agreement and added, "I know what post-traumatic stress is like. What Will is experiencing is *definitely* not that. Honestly, I'm surprised you didn't notice earlier. You've made a *very* big mistake-"

Owens sighed. "-Look, I understand that you're both upset, okay? I get it. And I would be, too, if I were in your shoes. But we are all in the same boat here, so I need you to try-"

"-What? To stay calm? Trust you?" Joyce snapped. "No, I want him transferred to a real hospital. Either that or let the Doctor here take a look at him!" she shouted, gesturing to him with her right hand.

"Well, I'm afraid that's not possible," Doctor Owens replied easily, filling the Doctor with frustration. "He really will get the best treatment here, Mrs. Byers."

She sighed and shook her head at everyone in the room, standing up. "A-And what are you...treating him for, exactly? Can anyone tell me what's wrong with him? Can a *single person* in this room tell me what is wrong with my boy?"

No one moved or said a word, until the Doctor sighed, moved forward, and laid a comforting hand on Joyce's shoulder. "Joyce, listen-"

"No, you listen to *me*," she shouted, whirling on him. "They can't tell me what's wrong with him, and yet they refuse to believe you!" Turning back around, she yelled, "What is *so* hard to believe about what the Doctor told you when you can't figure out what's wrong with Will yourselves?!"

Doctor Owens exhaled heavily, replying, "Look, I'm not going to pretend that this isn't new to us. But a hive mind and an ancient...monster? Don't you think that's a stretch?"

"Oh, for the love of-" the Doctor suddenly shouted, but cut himself off. "Maybe it is a stretch, but right now, it's all we've got. Please, *please*, just give me five minutes with him. What harm could *that* do?"

That argument was how the Doctor wound up crouched beside Will's hospital bed, with Rose and Joyce both hovering over him. "Don't worry," he whispered to them. "He'll be alright. One way or another."

Leaning over, he reached out and pressed his fingertips to the sides of Will's head and closed his eyes. Slowly and carefully, the Doctor glimpsed into Will's mind.

He saw, rather than the normal, corridor-like layout of a human mind, an immense labyrinth. A spiraling maze of dark tunnels, with many minds interconnected. Will was only one of many that the Umbra had taken control of, something that the Doctor realized with mounting horror. Said horror turned into complete panic as he tried to glimpse at who the other hosts were and found that they were either beasts or...dead. All of the human hosts- not many, but more than a dozen- that the Umbra had previously inhabited were dead now, according to the way their minds were completely inaccessible.

A soft growl that the Doctor felt rather than heard made him look deeper within the hive mind. There, at the very heart of it, was the consciousness of the Umbra. And judging by its movements, it had detected his presence.

The Doctor was forced to withdraw from Will's mind to keep the Umbra from attacking him. His eyes flew open and he gasped. "It's worse than I thought," he wheezed, and Joyce's eyes widened. "The Umbra's had other human hosts...and killed every one of them."

Rose clapped a hand over her mouth, and Joyce let out a choked sob. However, the Doctor silenced her with a look. "It won't kill him, too," he murmured. "Now, I can't stop it from taking over his mind. But we *can* keep it from using his body. All we have to do is make sure he stays unconscious."

"How?" Joyce stammered. "Are you saying that we should keep him unconscious for the rest of-"

"-No, no," he replied softly. "Only until we figure out a way to get it out of him. I don't really know anything about the Umbra's weaknesses, Joyce. It was thought to be long gone by the time I learned about it. But I will do my best to find a vulnerability and

exploit it. I promise you I'll do everything I can to help your son."

Joyce wrapped her arms around him and sobbed. "Thank you."

He opened his mouth to reply, but was interrupted by Doctor Owens opening the door to the room and walking in. "Time's up, Doc. Come with me; I wanna show you something. We can talk then."

First, Doctor Owens led him and another scientist- who, for some reason, was carrying the headpiece of a Hazmat suit- to a small room. Sitting inside it was Hopper, who was currently leaning over and retching into a bucket. The sight of his current state made the Doctor wince in sympathy.

"All right, cowboy, good news," Owens said to Hopper. "We're giving you the green light. How you feeling?"

Hopper turned around and gave him a small, pained smile. "Never better," he replied sarcastically. Then he shifted his gaze to the side. "Hey, Doc." The Doctor grinned in response. "Hello, Hopper."

Doctor Owens sighed and continued, "Well, we've got a present for ya." The other scientist stepped forward as if on cue.

Hopper sniffed. "The hell is that?"

Owens took a deep breath. "Ah, something you two should see."

The airlock door hissed as Hopper and the Doctor stepped through it. They were both wearing Hazmat suits, something that required quite a bit of persuasion and even more yelling on the Doctor's part. He tried to tell them that he was immune to toxic air, but seeing as they thought he was human and there was no way the Doctor was about to tell them otherwise, the other scientists had had none of it.

They walked closer to the metal structure that Owens and the other scientists were already standing on. It was similar to an elevator, controlled by pulleys and gears.

"Alright, watch your step," Owens instructed as they climbed onto it.

Once they were secure, the contraption began to lower, revealing something truly terrifying.

The tear in time and space was nothing like what it had been when the Doctor last saw it. Before it had been no bigger than an average doorway. Now, it had morphed into a fissure that was easily a kilometer long. Red light glowed from it dimly, and the gravity in the chasm was clearly abnormal. Hopper and the Doctor stared, wide-eyed, as Owens talked just behind them.

"All living organisms develop defense mechanisms against attack. They adapt. They find some way to survive."

A moment later, the lift came to a halt, and the Doctor was brought out of his head and back to reality. He was still at a loss for words, though, as he eyed the gate.

Owens glanced at him, taking note of his expression. "Yeah, it's really something, Doc." Motioning with his hand for Hopper and the Doctor to follow him, he stepped off of the lift.

He walked behind it, and soon was standing face-to-face with a network of tunnels not unlike the ones Hopper and the Doctor had nearly become trapped in.

"Oh my God," Hopper said, and Owens nodded. "Pretty impressive, isn't it?. It's been spreading, growing beneath us like some cancer."

"Then why aren't you burning it?" Hopper asked. Owens, in turn, sighed. "There's a complication."

The Doctor nodded in understanding."Will."

"Mom?" Will said weakly from the hospital bed, and Joyce and Bob rushed to his side, forgetting the quiet conversation they had been having just a moment before. Mike shot up from his chair, eager to see his friend. Rose, however, lingered. *This isn't good*, she thought to herself. *When he's conscious, that shadow thing can use his body for its own gain.*

And as Will spoke to his mother, Bob, and Mike, it became clear to

Rose that the situation was definitely worse. The Umbra had taken over enough of his mind that he couldn't remember who Bob was. Or her, which hurt even more than knowing just how much danger Will was in. She loved him probably just as much as she would if he was her own son, and he couldn't remember who she was.

A few minutes later, everyone was crowded around him in the hospital room, and Owens started asking him questions. He asked if Will knew what his name was, if he knew who the others in the room were, and if he remembered what had happened the night before. The answer to that question led to what frightened the Doctor and Rose the most.

"I remember...they hurt me," Will said, and Rose and Joyce both winced. Owens pressed further. "You mean the doctors?"

Will shook his head. "No. The soldiers."

"The soldiers hurt you?" Owens repeated.

"They shouldn't have done that," Will said darkly. "It upset him."

Owens sighed and reached into a folder. He pulled out a photograph of Will's drawing and showed it to him. "You say it upset him. Is this him?"

Will nodded.

"Alright. Now, I wanna try something. It's gonna seem a little odd at first, but I think it'll really help us understand what's going on here," Owens said, glancing around the room, then focusing back on Will. "Is that okay?" When Will nodded again, Owens motioned towards the door, "Okay. Bring it in."

A lab worker entered the room, pushing a metal cart. On top of it was a clear sort of tank, with a severed tendril inside. Upon glancing at it, the Doctor knew it was from the tunnels, and realized what they were about to do.

"Oi, you shouldn't do that," the Doctor piped up, but Owens ignored him. "Now, Will, I just want you to let us know if you feel anything. Okay?" With that, he nodded to the worker, who promptly lit a

blowtorch.

As he held it over the tendril, it emitted a soft screeching sound. "Do you feel anything?"

"Little sting," Will replied, nodding. The Doctor cut in, "This isn't necessary-"

"-It stings? Where?" Owens asked, tuning him out. Will grunted in pain as the blowtorch moved closer to the tendril and he gasped out, "My chest."

The flame moved closer still, and within a moment Will was screaming again. Joyce, the Doctor, and Rose all yelled at him to stop, and Owens waved a hand dismissively. The flame moved away, and Will's breathing slowed and his pain subsided.

Owens conversed with Joyce, Hopper, the Doctor, and Rose quietly in the hallway outside. "Our best guess right now is it's some kind of virus which is causing this neurological disorder. Now, when a typical virus attaches itself to its host, it duplicates, right? It spreads, essentially hijacking the host. A virus is alive. It has an intelligence. That's not unusual. What is so unusual here, this virus...the infected hosts seem to be communicating."

"I told you, it's a hive mind," the Doctor interrupted, and Owens nodded. "Yeah. You were right about that, Doc. And the good news is, a virus can be cured. We...we're gonna continue to run tests, and we're gonna see what we find."

The Doctor sighed in exasperation. "It's not a virus! It's a monster. It-"

Owens sighed. "Doc, how many times am I gonna have to tell you that there's no such things as-"

"-Listen to me. It's not a virus that's infected Will. It's a creature, a highly dangerous one trying to enslave humans. It takes over a host body and uses it for its own gain. It views itself as superior to everything else in the universe. It's trying to bring about the extinction of-"

"Okay, I've heard enough," Owens interjected. "I'm beginning to doubt your sanity. Especially because you used the word 'humans' like you weren't one."

"I'm not!" the Doctor yelled back. As he took a deep breath, he realized that blurting that out may have been a bad idea, but he didn't care. He had had it up to the ceiling with Hawkins Lab. And if telling Owens he wasn't human was how he could get him to stay out of his way, so be it.

Owens blinked at him incredulously. "I'm sorry, did you just say you weren't human?"

"Yeah, I did," the Doctor snapped. "And it's true, too. Take my pulse or do a brain scan, and you'll believe me. I'm telepathic and have two hearts. Now, ordinarily, that's not something I broadcast; especially not to people like you. But I am sick and tired of being ignored when I'm the one that knows what's going on here! I am trying to help Will, and all you're doing is getting in my way!"

"Well, what are you?" Owens asked, and the Doctor let out an annoyed groan. "If you must know, I'm a Time Lord from the planet Gallifrey located in the constellation of Kasterborous. And I am going to help Will, *no matter what*. You have a problem with that?" As he spat those last words at Owens, the Doctor glowered at him. Rose could see the raw anger in his eyes and didn't doubt that Owens did, too.

Finally, after a long, tense silence, Owens shook his head. "No. What do you need?"

During that silence, the Doctor's thoughts had drifted back to a different child that he had helped. A little girl that was waiting in the TARDIS, most likely wondering why they weren't home. Guilt flooded him. "Well, first, I need to step outside to make a call. Rose, can I have your phone?" He gave her an expectant look, and Rose reached into the pocket of her dark pink hoodie and pulled out a small black mobile phone. When Owens saw it, his eyes widened. "That's a ph-"

"-Shut up," the Doctor snapped, cutting him off. He took the phone from Rose and walked down the hallway towards the exit.

Once he was safely outside, he dialed the TARDIS' phone number, and muttered, "Please, El, pick up," as the dial tone rang and rang.

Finally, after a dozen rings, the answering machine tone sounded. Inhaling deeply, the Doctor murmured, "Hey. It's, uh...it's me. The Doctor. I know that Rose and I have been gone too long, and..." he sighed. "I just want you to know that it's not because of you or because of our fight. Okay, Jane? Something came up, and I will...I will explain everything when I see you. I just want you to know that I'm- we're- not mad at you. I'm just sorry. About everything." He paused, drawing in a rattling breath. I...I don't want you to get hurt at all, ever. And I don't want to lose you," he got out, his voice thick with emotion. Without thinking, he reached up to wipe at his eyes.

Oh. He was crying. That was new. "I am so sorry, El. We'll make it up to you, I promise." The Doctor paused, sighing. "Just...make sure you eat some real food, okay? Not just Eggos. And try to do other things besides watching TV and playing video games. And...we will be home soon. I mean it; I'll do whatever I can to get there as fast as possible." he paused again, wondering if he should say what he really wanted to. He'd never said it to her before, and didn't want to confuse her in any way. After a moment, though, he decided that she needed to know why he was leaving this message in the first place.

"I love you. Understand, El? And so does Rose. So please take care of yourself until we get back, because we *really* don't want anything to happen to you. I'll see you soon," he whispered, before finally hanging up the phone.

Unbeknownst to him, though, no one was inside the TARDIS. The little girl that the Doctor and Rose had both come to love so much was on the run.

(A/N: Parental angst! I had to. I mean, come on, they love that kid to death.)

10. Chapter 10

Chapter 10

Lost in Shadow

(A/N: Sorry that this chapter is so short! The episode ended on me kinda suddenly. [I watch and write simultaneously so I can get the details right.] To make up for it, I'll post another update later today if possible!)

Rose held onto Will's hand as Joyce and the Doctor argued with the security guards at the end of the hallway. Bob was leaning back into his chair while Mike was seated beside Rose, keeping watch.

Suddenly, Rose noticed Will's eyes glaze over. "Will?" she whispered. When he didn't respond, she tried again. "Will. *Will*."

Finally he sat up and looked at her. "What's wrong?" Rose murmured. "Are you hurting again?"

Will shook his head. "I saw something." At that, Mike perked up. "In your now-memories?" he asked, and Will whispered shakily, "The shadow monster...I think I know how to stop him."

"You *told* her?" Dustin said incredulously, and Lucas nodded. "Yeah, so what?"

Dustin scoffed. "'So what'?"

"*You* wanted to tell her, too," Lucas shot back.

Dustin sighed, rolling his eyes. "Yeah, but I didn't. Alright? We all agreed not to tell her, and to look for Dart."

"Who you conveniently found."

Dustin gave Lucas an affronted look and snapped, "Are you

suggesting that I'm lying?"

"I'm *saying* you have a creepy little bond with him." Dustin glared at Lucas and replied, "Yeah, that was *before* he turned into a Shadow-Walker."

Lucas tilted his head. "And you haven't heard from Mike?"

Dustin shook his head. "No." "Or Will?" "*No*." "Hopper?" "*No*! No one is around! Why do you think I'm with *Steve Harrington*? Something's-"

"-Wrong. I agree," Lucas said, nodding. "Which is why we need as much help as we can get." They both stood up, though they were still partially hidden from view by the rusted car they had been hiding behind. As they both watched Max, Lucas sighed. "She didn't believe me anyway."

Dustin smirked. "You probably didn't tell it right," he joked, and Lucas chuckled. "Yeah, that must be it." Turning to the side, he extended his hand to Dustin. "So, we good?"

Dustin smiled, but before he could accept the offered hand, a loud clang made them both turn around. Steve had hit the car with a metal folding chair to get their attention. He snapped, "Hey! Dickheads! How come the only one helping me out is this random girl? We lose light in 40 minutes; let's go," he ordered, motioning for them to follow him. As they started walking, Steve yelled, "*Let's go*, I said!"

"All right, asshole! God!" Dustin snapped, trudging after him.

Back at the lab, Will was seated at a long table with several scientist, his mother, the Doctor, and Rose crowded around him. He and the Doctor were eyeing several Polaroids of his house- images of the tunnels he had drawn. That had been the Doctor's idea; something he had come up with based on what Will had said.

Standing against the wall, one of the scientists snapped, "Sam, this is ludicrous," and Owens held up a hand to silence him. "Just give them a moment, okay?"

The scientist argued, "We don't have time-"

"Hey, jackass, why don't you do us all a favor and shut up, okay?" Hopper snapped, cutting him off. The Doctor nodded and said, without looking up, "Y'know, for once I'm with you, Hopper."

Suddenly, Will stood up, and made his way over to the head of the table. The Doctor stood just behind him, and placed a hand on his shoulder. Will pointed to the group of photographs in front of him- a large cavernous area in the map of tunnels. "That's it," he breathed.

"That's what?" Owens asked. "What's there, Will?"

Before Will could answer, the Doctor piped up, "That's the center! The heart of it. It's where a main part of the Umbra's intelligence resides; that's how the other dimension's been able to grow and spread-"

"Wait, wait, hold on," Owens interrupted. "The *what* now? What did you call that thing?"

"The Umbra," the Doctor replied. "That's what the Time Lords called it. The creature from Will's drawing, I mean. I don't really know much about it, other than that my people must have trapped it in there the last time it tried to cause trouble. I wasn't around for that, so I don't know details. All I know is that it gave them one hell of a headache dealing with it."

"-Sorry, but what's a Time Lord?" One of the scientists piped up.

The Doctor sighed in frustration. "It's what I am, and that's all you need to know. What we need to focus on is the more pressing matter at hand."

Will nodded, pointing to the picture. "I don't know what's there. I just know that...he doesn't want me to see it. I think it's important."

In one part of Hawkins, within an abandoned junkyard, a group of middle-schoolers and a teenager were trying to trap a dangerous creature. In another, deep in the recesses of a highly guarded lab, several soldiers were preparing to go into the lair of a beast.

As the lift lowered them into the abyss, Hopper, the Doctor, and Owens all watched while Joyce, Mike, Bob, and Rose stayed back to keep an eye on Will.

The Doctor eyed the soldiers' camera and the radar screen, frowning. The technician operating it gave him an odd look. "What are you-"

He was silenced quite effectively when the Doctor reached over and pressed several buttons on his sonic screwdriver. Instantly, the camera image became much clearer, and the other man's mouth fell open. "The hell did you do?"

"Oh, a little something to help you," he replied easily, smirking. He pocketed his sonic screwdriver as the lab worker unfolded a map and called out ot Owens, "Let's see if this kid's a wizard or a schizo, Doc." Turning back around, he spoke into the comm. "First door on your right, gentlemen."

The soldiers navigated the tunnels with little trouble, until they reached their supposed "destination" and the camera landed on a pile of bones.

"No, no, no, no," the Doctor exclaimed when he caught sight of the video feed. "That's where Hopper and I were. It's that bloody graveyard," he gasped out.

As if on cue, low growling emitted over the speakers. Suddenly, one of the soldiers spoke up. "Sir, we've got some kind of fog moving in now."

And there was fog- quite a bit of it. Enough that the camera was covered in thick white mist. "Oh, no," the Doctor whispered.

Meanwhile, in the hospital room, Will suddenly started breathing shakily. Turning to face his mother and Rose, he stammered, "I-I'm sorry."

Joyce's eyes widened and she murmured, "What do you mean, sweetie?"

"He made me do it," Will whimpered. Rose spoke up, "Who? Who made you do what, Will?"

"I told you. They upset him. They shouldn't have done that," Will replied, still whimpering. "They shouldn't have upset him!"

Mike's eyes widened in realization. "The spy," he murmured. "The spy!" Standing up, he made a run for the hallway as Rose drew in a horrified breath.

Before long, the lab had dissolved into chaos once again. Mike was wrestling with both the guards and Bob, yelling about a trap at the top of his lungs. The soldiers were yelling due to the fact that there were other living things in the area, but they couldn't see them because of the fog. The Doctor was arguing with Owens, as he impulsively wanted to run in there and help the soldiers himself. However, he was forced to listen in horror to clamoring voices and automatic gunfire. This was followed by screams of pain, and then...silence. Static crackled as the camera went offline, and a hush fell over the room.

From his hospital bed, Will sobbed as he told his mother, "It's too late." Then his expression changed. It became blank, although Rose could see the fear in his eyes.

"You should go now," he said, and Joyce did not reply, numb with shock. After a moment, Will gave them all a chilling warning. "They're almost here."

And while the Doctor did not hear that warning, almost immediately after that, he knew that running for their lives might be the only way everyone could survive this.

Standing on the other side of the glass was a pack of four-legged Shadow-Walkers.

(A/N: Next chapter will be the start of The Lost Sister. I know, I know, but the POV switch is necessary. I actually liked that episode- it gave us some good character development for El. I'm really gonna focus on that when I'm writing that ep, btw. It'll probably take two chapters, if I stick to my current system: one chapter = half an episode. I'll try to write it asap so I can resolve our cliffhanger here before long.)

11. Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Number Eight

(A/N: Double update woohoo! This chapter is also kinda short, but the next one will be longer because I'm gonna fit like three-quarters of The Lost Sister into it. It might be out tomorrow or the day after as I am on a roll. I'll probably start writing it tonight. Have fun!)

Jane stared, numb, at the image of the girl before her. It was the same girl her mother kept showing her in her memories. She briefly flitted her eyes to the top of the newspaper article- she was a lot better at reading now.

Indian Girl Missing in London

London. The name of that place sounded familiar, nagging in the back of Jane's mind. And then she remembered: London was where Rose had said she was from.

That was definitely a reminder that she didn't need. Thankfully, she wasn't able to dwell on it for more than a moment, because Becky asked, "Is that her?"

Jane nodded.

When she first attempted to find the girl, however, Jane was not successful. So she stayed with her aunt that night, curled up in a spare bed. She held the picture above her, turning it over and over in her hands. She closed her eyes, willing herself to focus.

Eventually, she reentered the recesses of her mind, and was greeted with the image of a girl sitting in front of a crackling fire.

"Hello?" Jane called out, walking towards her. Just as the girl turned her head, Jane's eyes flew open and she gasped for air.

She ran into the kitchen, calling, "Becky! Becky, I found her!"

To her surprise, Becky did not respond right away. Rather, Jane saw her talking on the phone with someone. "I didn't know who else to call. He gave me this number, and he came here looking for her. I thought maybe he could help me."

Dread filled Jane as she realized that Becky was probably talking about her. That fear was confirmed when Becky said into the phone, "Yeah, Jim Hopper, he came here with some woman named Joyce Byers? And these other two people. I think they may have been British. Yeah, they had the accent. It was a man and a woman. I don't remember the man's name, but I think he was some kind of doctor. And I'm pretty sure that the woman was named Rose. Rose...Tyler, maybe? I don't know; the doctor guy only said her last name in passing." Becky paused, sighing.

"Well, that's a little hard to explain. Uh...it's just that, there's another girl, and she's missing, and I think she's in trouble."

Jane didn't linger to see what else Becky would say. Rather, she grabbed some things from her aunt's purse and made a run for it. Even as she ran away, she could still hear Becky calling her name.

Rain pattered against the window of the bus that Jane was seated in. While she still felt slightly guilty for taking money from Becky, she needed it to reach her destination- Chicago. That was where the other girl was. Her *sister*, Jane realized. She was like her- kept in the lab, probably had a number on her wrist, and was most likely hiding.

When the bus reached the city, Jane stepped off and took a moment to admire her surroundings. People were walking around everywhere- it was nothing like Hawkins. Tall buildings were on every corner, lights still on despite how late it was. As she made her way down the sidewalk, Jane smiled at a few strangers that met her eye, but averted her gaze away from two uniformed officers that were watching the street.

She paused once more on a corner, looking up at the nearest skyscraper. However, she was brought out of her trance when a man

bumped her shoulder as he walked past. "Watch it, kid," he snapped, glaring at her.

"Mouth breather," she taunted the moment he was out of earshot.

Jane wandered for some time, walking down winding streets and even through a back alley full of people that seemed rather frightening. Eventually, a door with light coming from behind it got her attention. Based on the way the light flickered through the window, a fire was lit inside the building.

Slowly, Jane opened the door and crept inside. She could hear overlapping voices and quiet, breathless laughter. Taking a deep breath, she called out, "Hello?"

Silence fell for a brief moment, until several people stood up. One of them, a man with a very odd haircut, sneered, "Well, well. What have we here?"

Unperturbed by him, she said, "I'm looking for my sister."

He laughed, along with the other two women nearby. "Aww, Shirley Temple lost her sister," he mocked. "So sad."

"I saw her. Here," Jane insisted, reaching into the large bag she carried with her. Suddenly, the tall man standing in the background said, "Uh-uh! Hand out of pocket. Slow."

She did as he asked, the newspaper clipping in her hand. "Give me that shit," the other man ordered, snatching it from her grasp. The woman standing next to him leaned over his shoulder and asked, "Hey, is that Kali?"

"Kali?" Jane repeated, but they ignored her question. The man whirled on her. "Who else knows you're here?" he demanded.

"No one," she answered back, a hint of defiance in her voice. The man scoffed and rolled his eyes. "So, what, then? Poof, you just show up like magic with that picture?"

"-Stay calm, she's just a kid," the other woman interjected.

"A kid who could get us all killed," he shot back. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a very dangerous-looking knife. He held it in front of Jane's face, and she began to instinctively back away. "If I have to ask again, Shirley, you're gonna start losing things. Starting with those pretty little locks of yours; yeah?" he threatened.

"Come on, Axe, put down the knife," the woman insisted, moving closer. But the man- Axe, she had called him- ignored her, instead choosing to grab hold of Jane. "How did you find us?"

"I saw her!" Jane repeated. Axe only gripped her tighter. "That's not an answer!" he roared.

Suddenly, he looked down at his wrist, and his eyes widened, as if fueled by some unseen terror. Dropping the knife, he sputtered, "Jesus. Jesus Christ!" He began exclaiming in fear. "Get it off! Shit! *Shit*!" Jane did not understand why he was yelling, as there was nothing on him.

And then a new voice cut into the room- a girl's. "You're a terrible dancer, Axel."

Jane turned her head to see a girl with purplish-black hair leaning against a stair rail. Kali.

Axel immediately pointed a finger in her direction and yelled, "I told you, stay outta my head!"

Kali ignored him, stalking into the room. "So we're threatening little girls now, are we?" she said, tossing her head as she moved closer to Jane.

"She knows about you!" Axel shouted, and another girl moved closer, handing the newspaper clipping to Kali. "She had this."

If Kali was angry with Jane, her face did not show it as she gave it back, then asked her, "Where did you get this?"

"Mama," Jane replied, putting it back into her bag. Kali raised an eyebrow at her in disbelief. "Your mother gave this to you?"

Jane nodded. "In her memories."

Axel scoffed. "Memories? I think she's a schizo or something."

"She says she's looking for her sister." "-Yeah, like I said, schizo." As Axel moved to pick up the knife he had dropped, Jane drew it to her hand.

"Jesus!" Axel sputtered, watching as she turned the knife over in her hand before putting it down. Turning to Kali, Jane said, "I saw you. In the rainbow room."

Kali's friends only watched in shock as Kali walked in a circle around her. "And what is your name?" she asked, coming to a stop directly in front of her.

"Jane."

Kali regarded her with searching eyes, before reaching out and taking her hand. She rolled up the sleeve of Jane's jacket, finding the number eleven tattooed on her wrist. Jane, in turn, moved back Kali's glove, and found an eight in the same place on her arm.

"Sister," Jane murmured, looking back up at Kali, who nodded. "Sister." Then, Jane leaned forward, embracing her. She buried her face in her sister's shoulder as Kali tightened her grip on her. "It's alright, Jane," she murmured. "You're safe now."

Later, Jane sat across from Kali on the balcony of the abandoned building. "This memory your mother shared...that is your only memory of me?" Kali questioned, and Jane nodded. "Yes."

"And how long have you been with this doctor and his wife?"

"Three hundred and twenty-seven days," Jane replied, then added, "I don't think that they're actually married."

Kali smiled and shrugged. "I'm referring to her as his wife for simplicity." She paused, sighing. "So this doctor, he has been hiding you? He thinks his friend can work out some sort of deal with these men to set you free?"

"Yes. He says soon."

"He is naive, then," Kali said. "We'll always be monsters to them, do you understand?" When Jane nodded, she continued. "Let me guess. Your doctor, he also stops you from using your gifts?"

Jane nodded, but then shrugged. "Sometimes."

Kali sighed, twining their hands together. "What you can do is incredible. It makes you very special, Jane."

Jane's eyes widened. "Wait. Do you...have a gift?"

"Different," Kali replied. "I can make people see- or not see- whatever I choose." Jane scrutinized her at that. "Is...that why you made the man with the crazy hair dance?"

Kali grinned and laughed softly. "Axel is not so fond of spiders, so..." she shrugged. "You made him see spiders?"

Kali nodded, and a small smile made its way onto Jane's lips. "It doesn't have to be scary, you know," Kali explained.

Slowly, she opened her closed palm, and a brightly-colored butterfly flew into the air. "This butterfly, it isn't real. I've just convinced your mind it is. Think of it as a kind of...magic."

Then, Kali grabbed ahold of the butterfly, and it vanished. Jane narrowed her eyes at Kali in sudden suspicion. "Are you real?"

"Yes, I'm real."

Almost as if she didn't believe her, Jane reached out and poked Kali in the face. She did it several times before they both collapsed into giggling. Jane hadn't laughed like this since...since the day the Doctor took them back to Hawkins.

Jane's mind was still on that as she was speaking to Kali some time later. "I think this is your home," Kali murmured, and Jane smiled. "Home."

Kali grinned, oblivious to the weight in Jane's mind. "Yes. Home."

Despite the fact that Jane missed the Doctor and Rose- no matter how hard she tried to deny it- for a moment, she let herself believe Kali. Being with her sister meant that she was home.

(A/N: Apologies about length again! Also,I know that in the other fic I said Terry and Becky lived in Chicago. That was a mistake and I will fix it, just not yet. My stupid brain thought Chicago was in Indiana instead of Illinois. To be fair, both states start with the letter I but it still makes me feel like an idiot. Oops. Anyway, stay tuned, and leave a review!)

12. Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Running Home

(A/N: This chap is kind of a beast. Over 4k counting the author notes, just under without. In here we finish up The Lost Sister. Also, I reference my prequel and really zero in on El's character development. Hope you like it!)

That night, when Jane slept in an abandoned building, protected by her sister, she entered the place her mind always went to when she looked for someone. She did not find a person, but rather came across the TARDIS phone, the receiver dangling by its cord, having fallen off the wall. When she strained her ears, Jane could make out faint words. As she listened, guilt began to make a reappearance.

"*Hey. It's, uh...it's me. The Doctor. I know that Rose and I have been gone too long, and...*" A pause. *"I just want you to know that it's not because of you or because of our fight. Okay, Jane? Something came up, and I will...I will explain everything when I see you. I just want you to know that I'm- we're- not mad at you. I'm just sorry."*

And then a hand grasped her shoulder, and Jane was brought out of her "dream" and into reality. The abruptness of it made her gasp, and Kali whispered, "It's okay. It's only me."

As Jane sat up slowly, Kali asked, "Bad dream?"

Jane didn't answer her, instead opting to ask, "What time is it?"

A small smile graced the corners of Kali's mouth. "It's late. You slept well. Come," she said, motioning for Jane to get up. "It's time you meet my friends. Properly this time."

After the introductions, Kali dumped a handful of badges and ID

cards on the table in front of Jane. "Everyone you see here was in some way responsible for what happened to us."

Jane picked up the nearest ID, examined it, then set it back down on the table. "You hurt the bad men?" she asked.

The girl standing next to Kali, who had spiky blonde hair that was tied back in an odd way- Dottie- scoffed and drawled sarcastically, "No, we just...give 'em a pat on the back."

Then Kali explained what their normal procedure was, and Jane's eyes widened. "You kill them?"

"They're criminals. We simply make them pay for their crimes," Kali replied.

Jane knew someone who would strongly object to that point of view, but of course did not say that aloud. Axel seemed to sense her shock, though, as he joked, "Damn, Shirley, what's the matter? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"We can't all be fighters, I guess," Dottie said in a bored voice, and Jane shook her head, looking back up at them. "I'm a fighter. I've killed."

Kali leaned forward, narrowing her eyes slightly. "These men you killed...did they deserve it?"

That was something that Jane had learned wasn't a simple yes or no question. It was a matter of opinion. Her mind, however, drifted back to what the Doctor had told her one night, when she was feeling particularly guilty over it.

"*Look, maybe those people didn't deserve to die. But they were hurting you, and you were scared. You did what you had to do in order to protect yourself. No one would blame you for that. I don't."*

After a moment, Jane replied, "They hurt me."

"And they still want to hurt you. To hurt us," Kali said, her voice insistent. "We're just making the first move. Come," she instructed, tilting her head in a "follow me" motion.

Jane sighed softly, then turned to the side and trailed after her sister. As they walked down a gravel path, Kali began speaking again. "I was just like you once. I kept my anger inside. But then that pain festered."

"Festered?" Jane repeated. She'd heard that word before, but couldn't remember what it meant.

Kali came to a stop, looked Jane square in the eye, and nodded. "It spread. Until finally, I confronted my pain, and I began to heal." Then Kali turned to the side and started walking again.

As Jane followed her, she thought about Kali's words. It was, in some ways, similar to a story the Doctor had told her. Not long after she had learned about her mother, she asked the Doctor about his- that was what had prompted her to ask about Terry in the first place. He, in turn, told her that just before he visited Hawkins for the first time, he discovered that his mother, Penelope, was still alive. Seeing her had, according to him, brought up old pain that he had buried deep. But thanks to his mother, he had been able to put it behind him, and was all the better for it.

When Kali came to a stop again, there was a large rusted train car facing them. "Do you see that train?" she asked, pointing to it. When Jane replied that yes, she did, Kali instructed, "I want you to draw it to us."

Jane gave her an apprehensive look, but willed herself to focus anyway. She held out her hand, which trembled as she used all her strength to pull the train car closer.

While the metal creaked and it moved a few inches off the ground, Jane was unable to do no more than that. It fell back into its original position with a loud clang as Jane leaned over, panting. "I can't," she rasped.

"Last night, you told me you lifted a van once," Kali argued. "The bad men were trying to take you away again, and that made you angry."

Jane nodded, and Kali cleared her throat before continuing. "Good.

So find that anger. Focus on that- not the train, not its weight."

Jane sighed and turned her attention to the train car once more. As she held out her hand, Kali instructed, "I want you to find something from your life. Something that angers you. Now channel it."

As she spoke those words, one thing in particular stood out in Jane's mind. Mike standing in the gym with that unknown girl, *laughing*. As she concentrated on that anger, the train car began to creep towards them, its wheels dragging the ground.

"Dig deeper. Your whole life, you've been lied to-"

"*Is my mother gone?" "Yeah. More or less."*

"Imprisoned!"

More things came to her mind- being thrown in a small room in Hawkins Lab, the Doctor yelling at her. The way she screamed back at him.

"The bad men took away your home, your mother. They took *everything* from you. They stole your life, Jane!"

As Kali spoke those words, the train car began to move faster as it skidded toward them. Countless things flooded her mind, filling her with anger. Her mother being hurt, Brenner making her find the monster. The way she screamed in terror as it chased after her and no one bothered to help her.

That was enough to make her scream all over again as the train car came to a halt at their feet. Jane sank to her knees, exhausted.

As she moved to a normal sitting position, she turned her head towards the sound of loud cheering- Mick and Dottie were clapping and smiling at her. After a moment, Kali sat down beside her. "So, how do you feel?"

"Good," Jane replied. And that was enough for her.

Kali led her to a smaller room inside the building, where several

photographs were tacked up on a wall. Some had black Xs drawn on them. "These are the 'bad men', as you call them," Kali explained. "The ones we believe are still alive. Do you know any?"

Jane scanned the various photos, finding that most of them were unfamiliar. Except for one.

"Him," she replied, pointing to a photo from a newspaper article. The man was bald, with a dark beard. He had been in her mother's memory, when she was strapped to that table. "He hurt Mama."

Kali gave her a solemn look. "His name is Ray Caroll. And he did more than hurt your mother." She sighed, looking back up at the photos. "The bad men like Ray, they know about us. It's made them hard to track. But maybe not anymore," Kali said, giving Jane a pointed look.

Which was how she wound up blindfolded on top of a stepladder, his photo rolled up in her hands. Once she located him, she tore the picture in two, lifted up her blindfold, then nodded.

Much later, Jane sat in the backseat of a large van, with dark clothes on, makeup and a mask on her face, and her hair slicked back. She laughed with the others as loud music blared. Much to her confusion, though, the van screeched to a halt at a gas station. As the doors opened and everyone moved in the direction of the nearby convenience store, Jane asked her sister, "What are we doing?" Kali smirked and replied, "Stocking up."

Kali distracted the man at the register while everyone else ran up and down the various aisles, grabbing whatever they wanted. On impulse, Jane grabbed several boxes of Eggos.

As she moved back towards the center of the store, however, she saw the worker pointing a small pistol at Kali. "I said stay back," he threatened, his voice shaking.

Without waiting to be asked for help, Jane rushed forward and, shouting, flung the man backwards into the wall. Axel's eyes widened as they all stared. "Damn, Shirley," he said, chuckling.

Everyone made a run for it, however, as the sound of wailing police sirens emanated from nearby. As they climbed into the van and took off, fuel sprayed from the torn gas pump.

Jane leaned back in her seat, exhilaration rushing through her as she came to the realization that that they had barely escaped.

Night fell before they reached Ray Caroll's home. "We should case the place, stick to the routine," Mick said. "We have time."

'We also have her," Kali replied, glancing at Jane. "Can you look?" she asked, and Jane nodded.

A minute or so later, Jane opened her eyes and told them what she saw. "He's watching television."

"Well, is he alone?" Mick asked.

"I saw him. No one else."

Kali shrugged and smiled. "Good enough for me."

"Me, too," Dottie agreed, still bouncing up and down in her seat. "Let's do this."

Before long, Ray Caroll was sitting down in his living room chair, an expression of pure terror on his face as Kali removed her mask. She then nodded in silent instruction for Jane to do the same.

"Do you remember us?" Kali asked, and Ray shook his head. The lights flickered, and Jane could hear Kali saying, "What about us? Do you remember us, Ray?" but it wasn't her voice. It was the voice of a much younger child.

When the lights came back on, Kali struck him across the face, and he collapsed onto the floor. He was on all fours, but he looked up at them and whispered, "Please. Please..."

"You. Hurt. Mama," Jane said coldly, before flinging him into the nearest wall.

As they turned to the side and started walking towards where he laid on the floor, Ray spoke up. "Wait, please. Listen," he said shakily. "I just did what he told me to do. He said she was sick!"

Kali gave him an almost imperceptible shake of her head. "You had a choice, Ray. And you chose to follow a man you knew was evil."

Jane held out her hand, prepared to deal a death blow, but he interrupted her. "No, no, wait! Wait! I can...help. I can help you find him."

"Find who?" Kali snarled.

"Brenner!" Ray shouted, his voice desperate. "I can take you to him."

Jane shook her head, looking down at him. "Papa is gone."

"No, he is alive," Ray choked out. Kali said sternly, "Do *not* lie to us, Ray."

"I'm not lying! I swear," he said, before he whimpered and his speech became incomprehensible. "He...he trusts me," Ray stammered after a pause. "I'll take you to him."

"If he is alive, Jane will find him," Kali said coldly. "Just as she found you." Turning to the side, she ordered, "Do it, Jane. Do it!"

Jane hesitated, but only for a moment. Her mother's terrified face reentered her mind and Jane bared her teeth at him, using her mind to cut off his air supply.

As he slid across the floor, gagging, Kali said, "Not too quick. He wasn't so generous with your mother." Jane tightened her grip on him even more, Ray's eyes widening as he realized that she was not going to leave him alive.

And then her eyes fell on the photograph. The glass was cracked from where it had fallen off the wall, but the image could clearly be seen: Ray, smiling, with two young girls on either side of him. Most likely, they were his daughters.

Suddenly, Jane no longer saw the face of the heartless man who

permanently damaged her mother. She saw someone who those two girls probably cared for very much, despite anything he may have done. And he most likely did everything he could to take care of them. Like…

Like the Doctor and Rose had taken care of her. No matter what Jane did, she could still go back to them if she really wanted to. But if she killed this man...who would those little girls have?

Slowly, Jane released her hold on him. Ray coughed and gasped for air, but Jane was deaf to it. Deaf to Kali goading her on, saying that he had taken her mother without hesitation, and therefore he did not deserve mercy. Deaf to Axel and Dottie telling Kali that they had to run because two kids had called the police. All that she focused on was the ringing in her ears and the guilt that came crashing down on her like a wave.

The only thing that brought her back to reality was Kali pointing her pistol at Ray. As he yelled out in fear, Jane tilted her head and sent it flying through the glass window.

Kali gazed at her, aghast, as police sirens began to wail. "We gotta go, Kali!" Axel yelled.

In the end, they all ran for their lives, leaving Ray behind.

As Mick drove them to safety, Kali snapped at Jane, "If you wanted to show mercy, that is your choice. But don't you *ever* take away mine. Ever. Do you understand?" When Jane said nothing, she repeated, louder, "Do you *understand*?!"

Much later, Jane was back in the shelter of the abandoned building. She was seated in the chair beside her mattress, clinging to the sweater she had previously worn. It was pale pink- Rose had given it to her.

The thought of Rose made a tear roll down Jane's cheek. No matter what Jane had done or said, Rose had always been so *kind* to her, even in times when the Doctor had been frustrated or annoyed with her. Rose had done things like telling her that she was pretty and

clever, and reassured her by promising to keep her safe. She had almost...treated her the way a mother would treat her daughter.

A soft knock brought Jane out of her head. "May I sit?" Kali asked softly. Jane said nothing, but her sister entered the room anyway, sitting down on the mattress.

"I was once just like you, you know that?" Kali murmured, and Jane had to fight the urge to say, "*I'm* nothing *like you*," as Kali continued. "But that's why I'm hard on you, because I see in you my past mistakes."

Jane shook her head. "They were kids."

"Does that excuse that man's sins?" she argued. "Were we not also children?"

When Jane looked away from her, Kali sighed. "I remember the day I came to the rainbow room and you were...gone. So when my gifts were strong enough, I used them to escape. And I ran. I ran away as far as I could. And it was there, far away, that I found a place to hide. A family. A home. Just like you and your doctor. But...they couldn't help me. And eventually, I lost them too."

Kali paused, drawing in a shuddering breath. "So, I decided to play the part. To stop hiding. To use my gifts against those who hurt us. You're now faced with the same choice, Jane. Go back into hiding and hope they don't find you. Or fight, and face them again."

Jane looked directly at Kali and sighed. "Face who?"

"The man who calls himself our father."

Jane shook her head no. "Papa is dead."

Suddenly, a voice emanated from behind her. *His* voice. "That man tonight disagreed."

Jane turned around to find Brenner standing in the doorway. Or rather, a projection of Brenner that she knew Kali was responsible for. "You're not real," she said firmly, though her voice was shaking.

The image of Brenner questioned, "All this time? And you haven't looked for me? Why?" When Jane said nothing, he spoke again. "Because you thought I was dead? Or because you were afraid of what you might find?"

Jane refused to answer him. "Go away."

"You have to confront your pain. You have a wound, Eleven; a terrible wound. And it's festering."

Jane shuddered at the sight of him so close to her, real or not. She fell back into a sitting position on the mattress, and "Brenner" crouched down in front of her. "Do you remember what that means? Festering?" he said, in that icily calm voice of his. "It means a rot. And it will grow. Spread."

Jane shook her head again. "Get out of my head," she whispered. But the image of Brenner remained. "And eventually, it will kill you," he murmured, his voice echoing.

Jane could stand it no longer. "Get out of my head!" she screamed, tears pouring from her eyes. The lights in the room flickered rapidly for a moment, and Brenner was gone the instant they went back to normal. She collapsed into sobs as Kali moved to stand in front of her. Her heart twinged as she realized that, had she started crying when the Doctor, Rose, or her friends were around, they would have comforted her. In some ways, Jane wanted that. But Kali only crouched down to look at her.

"This isn't a prison, Jane," Kali murmured. "You're always free to return to your doctor and his wife. Or stay, and avenge your mother."

I still have a mother, Jane wanted to say. Because, in a lot of ways, that was true- all this time she had gone on thinking she had no mother, which was *almost* proven upon meeting Terry. And although it took a lot to make her realize it, Jane now knew, with a sharp wave of realization, that that was false- she had Rose. *Rose*, a woman who had been nothing but kind and gentle. Who had taken her in and given her a home. Rose was who Jane would call a mother, from now on.

Kali's voice broke her from her thoughts. "Let us heal our wounds. Together." Then she stood up, turned around, and walked away, leaving Jane alone once more.

As Jane sat on her bed, still clinging to her old sweater, she thought back to all of the things she missed about the life she had run from. All that she'd been through.

"*Maybe we can call you 'El'. Short for Eleven."*

"*You better run! She's our friend and she's crazy!"*

"*No, El, you're not the monster. You saved me? You understand? You* saved *me."*

"*Hang on tight, El! The flight might be a little bit scary, but this'll be an adventure! Right, Rose?" "Yeah, definitely."*

"*Are we good, Jane?" "We're good."*

"*Are you ready to come home with us?" "Home." "Yeah. Home."*

When Jane opened her eyes, she was no longer seeing her surroundings. Rather, she was deep within her mind. She took a deep breath, then began walking.

She saw the Doctor, hunched over some kind of beeping panel. He was pacing, and he looked pale and nervous. Jane stepped closer to him, her eyes full of pain. She *missed* him so much. "That's where Hopper and I were," he gasped suddenly. "It's that bloody graveyard!"

Then another voice got her attention. *Mike*. "I need to get through! I need to warn them! I need to get through; it's a trap! I need to tell them it's a trap!"

Jane ran toward him, as he yelled and fought against people she couldn't see. "Mike!" She tried to touch him, but he faded away. "Mike! *Mike*!" She screamed his name, looking around desperately. "Mike, where are you?!"

Then she turned around, a loud thudding catching her attention.

Someone or something was trying to break down a door. The door to the building they were in, Jane realized, and she came back to reality with a start.

Standing up, she ran to the nearest window. Dozens of officers had broken down the door and were prowling around the building like ants.

Then she felt a tap on her shoulder. Turning around, Jane saw Kali waiting for her. "Let's go," she ordered, and Jane wasn't about to argue as they ran for their lives.

They ran up a flight of stairs into the room where the rest of Kali's friends were. "The hell's going on?" Axel demanded. "They found us!" Kali replied, running over.

Axel reached for his gun, stammering. But Kali held out a hand to stop him. "No, no. Shh!" She stretched out her arms, tilting her head in a way that clearly meant *Don't move*.

The officers filed in, and based on the way they acted, could not see them. The moment they had all stalked across the room and moved behind them, everyone ran.

They made it outside, but were spotted by even more officers. They ducked behind the van in a shower of bullets, Kali put up an imaginary wall, and the gunfire ceased.

As Kali and the others climbed into the van, Jane stayed where she was, standing in front of it. When she did not move immediately, Kali exclaimed, "Jane, get in."

Jane shook her head, remembering what the Doctor had said about a graveyard and Mike's screaming about a trap. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, but I have to go back. My friends...my friends are in danger!"

Kali sighed, and the wall she had put up dissolved into mist. "Your mother sent you here for a reason, remember? We belong together. There is nothing for you back there. They cannot save you, Jane!"

Jane. That was never even who she was to begin with. It was only a

name that her mother never got to use. Eleven was a number that Brenner had used to identify her. But El? That was something different. It was something she had chosen.

El, in turn, shook her head again. "No," she said, her voice thick with emotion. "But I can save them."

Turning around, she started to run, even as Kali called out to her. "Jane. Jane!" But El kept moving, never looking back even once.

Once more, El found herself looking out the window of a bus as rain drummed against the glass. She sighed, but had to smile as she thought about what she was going to do. It would probably be dangerous, but worth it. Not only would she get to see Mike again, she was going back to the people she considered family.

Which is why, when a friendly older woman asked where she was headed, she replied, "I'm going to my friends. I'm going home."

(A/N: Wow, that was hard work for me. But I hope you enjoyed, and leave a review if you did!)

13. Chapter 13

Chapter 13

The Shadow-Walkers

(A/N: And here is the first half of The Mind Flayer! Wow, we're getting close to the end here. Don't worry, I plan on doing at LEAST a post-S2 epilogue so we can see our characters not worrying about saving the universe for a change. Hope you enjoy!)

The Doctor and Hopper peered through the glass, numb with shock as a four-legged Shadow-Walker climbed up the chasm. Its clawed feet thudded against the concrete floor as it looked at them. Owens, who was standing several feet behind them, exclaimed, "Mother of God."

Then, the Shadow-Walker stood up on its hind legs, growling softly as it placed its front feet up against the glass. No one moved or said a word, and the Doctor hardly even dared to breathe. The animal's breath fogged the glass as it moved its head from side to side, studying them.

Suddenly, its mouth opened and it let out a furious screech. It reared back, then started flinging itself bodily at the glass, trying to break through it.

"It...it's polycarbonate. It can't get through," Owens stammered. No sooner than he had spoken those words did the Shadow-Walker lift up its head like a wolf howling and let out a roar. More of the Shadow-Walkers began to climb up the hole, joining the first one in front of the glass.

"Oh, no," the Doctor murmured. The Shadow-Walkers wasted no time in attacking the glass. Cracks like spiderwebs began to appear, and Hopper asked Owens, "You sure about that glass?"

Sighing, Owens looked down at the control panel and, after a moment, slammed his hand down on a large button. An alarm went off.

"Run," the Doctor said, making a break for the door. "Everyone, run!"

Seeing as the glass was about to break at any moment, no one argued with him.

Not two seconds after everyone made it out of the room, an instant before Hopper slammed the door behind them, the sound of glass shattering echoed throughout the room. The Doctor could hear a horrible, hissing voice yell, "No survivors! We have to get the Doctor!"

Meanwhile, Mike grabbed a vial of sedative and a syringe, holding one up. "We need to make Will sleep."

"What?" Joyce exclaimed in disbelief, and Mike replied, "He's a spy. If he knows where we are, so does the Umbra!"

"He's lying!" Will yelled.

Mike shook his head. "He killed those soldiers; he'll kill us, too!" Rose's eyes widened, and she murmured, "It's just like what the Doctor warned us about..."

Will, meanwhile, started to struggle against his mother's grasp, as he yelled "He's lying" over and over.

Suddenly, loud pops could be heard, and Bob yelled, "Those are gunshots!" Will still screamed and struggled, until his mother said, "Okay, Will, listen. Listen. Do you know who I am?" When Will regarded her with a blank expression, she repeated the question. "*Do you know who I am?*"

Will didn't say anything right away. "You're..." his eyes darted back and forth, as if he was scanning her. "You're Mom."

Joyce sighed, looked over to Rose- who was biting her lip nervously- and then looked back at Will. "Hold him down."

Will began to scream as Bob nodded and held Will in a firm grip. "No! No! Let go! Let me go!" Joyce grabbed the vial and syringe from Mike, who promptly put his hands over his ears to block out Will's screams. Rose shut her eyes tightly as tears began to spill over.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," Joyce whimpered as she rolled up Will's sleeve and jabbed the needle into his arm. After a moment, his yelling faded away, and his eyes rolled back into his head as he drifted off.

A moment later, Hopper, the Doctor, and Owens burst in the room. After taking one look at the scene- Will, slumped over unconscious, a syringe in Joyce's hand, the snarling and shouts from the Shadow-Walkers that were chasing them grew louder, and they began breaking down the nearest door. Hopper said quickly, "We gotta go. We gotta go."

He ran over to Will's hospital bed and scooped him up like he weighed nothing, while the Doctor grabbed the nearest vials of sedative and put them in his pocket before they all ran out.

Screams of terror as well as the sound of rapid gunfire emanated from all around them, and bodies fell before their eyes. One guard had the misfortune of being pounced on and fell backwards. They all stopped and turned around, prepared to go back the other way, but the path was blocked by another guard with a machine gun.

"In here, quick!" Joyce yelled, opening the door to a side room. Once everyone had filed in, Hopper slammed the door shut and locked it.

"Oh, my God," Bob said, looking at the camera monitors.

Shadow-Walkers were prowling up and down nearly every hallway, feasting on the bodies of unfortunate scientists and soldiers. A moment later, though, the images disappeared as the monitors shut off and the room went dark.

Joyce gasped. "Oh, dear God."

The noises that followed all pointed to one thing: every bit of power in the lab was shutting down.

Owens hunched over a map of the lab, marking on it with a red pen. "Look, this is us, and this is the nearest exit. But even if we somehow make it there, there's no way out. The locks are fail secure."

"F-Fail secure?" Joyce stammered in confusion, and Owens nodded. "Yeah, whenever there's a power outage, the whole building goes on full lockdown."

Rose piped up, "Couldn't you get the power back with your sonic screwdriver, Doctor?"

He shook his head. "No. It's not powerful enough for that. And, yeah, it could unlock a door, but for some reason..."

The Doctor pulled his screwdriver out of his pocket and pressed a button. Instead of lighting up the way it normally would, it did nothing. "The frequencies are jammed again," he concluded. "I'll have to get that fixed."

Bob's eyes widened when he saw the sonic. "What is that thing?"

The Doctor smirked. "It's called a sonic screwdriver."

"I've never heard of that before," Bob said, and the Doctor smirked and replied, "Course you haven't, I invented it." Turning back to Owens, he asked, "Can it be unlocked remotely?"

Owens nodded again. "With a computer, sure, but somebody's gotta reset the breakers."

"Where are the breakers?" Hopper asked.

"Breakers are in the basement, three floors down." With that, Hopper grabbed the map, and moved towards the door.

"Hey, where are you going?" Bob hissed, and Hopper gave him an incredulous look and replied, "To reset the breakers."

"Okay, then what?"

Hopper rolled his eyes. "Then we get the hell outta here."

"No, then the power comes back on," Bob shot back. "If you wanna unlock the doors, you have to completely reboot the computer system, and then override the security codes with a manual input."

The Doctor nodded in agreement. "Yeah, he's right about that."

"Well, how do I do that?" Hopper asked.

Bob sighed in frustration. "You can't! Not unless you know BASIC," he exclaimed, and Hopper tilted his head in confusion. "I don't know what that means."

"It's a computer programming language," the Doctor and Mike said in unison.

Hopper moved closer to Bob. "Alright, teach it to me," he said briskly, and Bob scoffed. "Shall I teach you French while I'm at it, Jim? How about a little German?"

As Bob turned around, the Doctor let out a stifled laugh. It quickly died out, though, as Bob turned to Owens and asked, "How about you, *Doc*? You speak BASIC?" and Owens shook his head. "No."

Bob sighed and nodded. "Okay, I got this." He turned back to face Hopper and repeated, "I got this."

Joyce started to protest. "No, Bob-"

"-I'll go with him," the Doctor blurted out. Bob's eyes widened. "Why would you want to-"

"-Look, it's me those things *really* want. I don't know if you heard them, but the leader said, 'We have to get the Doctor'. And I'm pretty sure they weren't talking about our, ah, *friend* here," he said, nodding in Owens' direction. "At the very least, I can distract them."

Rose clapped a hand over her mouth and let out a whimper. She moved closer to the Doctor, whispering, "No, please. If any of us have to go down there, it should be me. I can figure it out. I-"

"Rose, look at me," he murmured, taking her face in his hands. "*Look at me*," he repeated firmly. "I will be fine. You know me; I always

survive. And-" He gave her a pointed look when she started to protest, silencing her. "*Rose*. It's going to be okay."

"Please don't do this," she whimpered, a tear rolling down her cheek. "I don't- I can't lose you again!"

The Doctor shook his head. "You won't. I promise you that." Leaning forward, he pressed a gentle kiss to her lips, then her forehead. "We'll be back," he murmured, after pulling away from her. "We'll be back."

Then, he turned back to Bob. "Okay, let's go."

The Doctor nearly fainted at the sight of Hopper dragging the dead body of a guard. It almost made him ill. Nevertheless, he bent down when Bob did, and Hopper ordered, "Okay, one of you grab his walkie."

The Doctor did as he asked, mumbling "sorry" under his breath as he took the radio from the dead man, and handed it to Bob. "Here. You take this."

Then Hopper grabbed the gun that was in the guard's holster, loaded it, and handed it to the Doctor. "All right. Either of you know how to use one of these?"

Somewhat hesitantly, the Doctor nodded. "Yeah. I mean, I hate them, but I know how to shoot one."

Hopper sighed. "Yeah, well, if you wanna live, I'd suggest taking the gun, Doc."

The Doctor nodded, then grimaced. "Desperate times call for desperate measures, I suppose."

Hopper smirked. "Yeah, that's the spirit. Look, if anything happens down there, I want you both to come right back up, okay? No heroics."

The Doctor nodded. "Right back here. And, listen..." he sighed. "Don't wait for me. As soon as we get those doors open..." he gave Hopper a pointed look, while Bob nodded in agreement. "Yeah, don't wait."

"I'm gonna get them out. I promise," Hopper said, and the Doctor smiled slightly. "Thank you. Well..." he said slowly, glancing at Bob, "We'll be in touch."

With that, they both stood up and began walking down the stairs.

As they made their way through the lab, Bob jumped up, startled, when a pipe hissed overhead. "Keep it together, Bob," he said to himself.

Then he turned to the right, opening the door to the breaker room. Inside, there were several scientists, their bodies torn and bloodied from the Shadow-Walkers' attack.

"Oh, God," Bob gasped out, and the Doctor nodded in agreement just behind him. "Yeah, it's awful," he murmured. "But we have to keep moving." Bob nodded after several moments, then stepped inside the room. The Doctor followed him, shutting the door behind them. As they stepped over the fallen bodies, both of them winced.

When they reached the breaker switches, Bob said, "Okay, here we go," and flipped the first switch. The room immediately lit up, and the Doctor crouched down and flipped the other two levers. "We made it," the Doctor said, letting out a breathless laugh, and Bob nodded, smiling along with him. "Yeah. We made it."

Then the walkie-talkie crackled to life, and Owens' voice could be heard. *"Alright, guys, can you hear us?"*

Bob nodded as he spoke into the radio. "Loud and clear, Doc. Can you hear me back?"

"*Yeah, we hear ya, all right."*

"Okay, give me a minute," Bob replied, before he turned his attention to the computer, typing like mad while the Doctor kept watch on the door.

Then, Bob said suddenly, "Open sesame." As he unlocked the doors, Bob chuckled. "Easy-peasy."

The Doctor caught a glimpse of the computer screen and grinned. "Brilliant! Now let's get the bloody hell out of here."

Then, the radio crackled again. *"You've got some company."*

"Where?" Bob asked.

"*The west stairwell."* "I got an idea."

Bob handed the radio to the Doctor. "Here, hold this," he said, and ran back to the computer.

"Wait, Bob, what are you-"

Bob smiled slightly. "And...splash." Then he turned back to the Doctor. "I activated the sprinkler."

The Doctor grinned again. "Bob, you're a genius!"

Owens seemed to agree with him. *"Okay. Okay, that worked,"* he said, a hint of surprise in his voice. *"Now, get out of there. Go, go!"*

Neither of them needed to be told twice- they ran for the door.

After they made it up the stairs, Owens' voice came through the walkie-talkie again. "Hey, guys? I'm gonna guide you, okay?"

"Is there a problem?" Bob asked.

"No, it's just, uh...it's getting a little crowded up here, so we're gonna have to take this slow."

They followed his directions down a few hallways, when Owens suddenly yelled, *"STOP!"*

Bob spoke into the radio. "Alright, what?"

"*Guys, there's a door on your left, do you see that?"* Bob turned to the side, then nodded. "Yeah."

"*That's a closet."* "Okay?" *"I need you both to get in it."* "What?" Bob asked, incredulous, while the Doctor was already opening the door.

"You heard him, get in," he hissed.

Bob didn't argue any further, and ducked inside it. A moment after they did so, the sound of footsteps began to echo in the silent hallway. They both breathed heavily, waiting for the animal to walk away.

After several terrifying, silent moments, the monster's shadow moved past and Owens spoke again. *"How you guys holding up there? You alright?"*

"Yeah, we're okay," Bob replied, nodding.

"*You got a pretty clear shot to the front door."*

"Okay," Bob whispered, his voice shaking. Then, the Doctor suddenly grabbed the radio and spoke into it. "Oi, what about you?"

"*Ah, don't worry about me, kid. I'll be alright. Just get the hell out of this place."*

The Doctor nodded. "Good luck. You'll need it."

As they exited the closet, a broomstick suddenly toppled over, clattering against the tile floor. The Shadow-Walker turned around, its attention captured by the noise.

For a moment, they were both frozen where they stood, looking in the eye of the snarling beast. Only the loud shout that came over the PA system broke them from their trance.

"*RUN!"*

As they turned around and sped off, so did the Shadow-Walker. Bob screamed as it chased them, and the Doctor yelled, "Go! I'll distract it!"

Bob kept running down the hallway, while the Doctor changed direction and turned down another hallway. "Leave him!" the Doctor shouted at the animal, and turned around to face it- albeit still running. "It's me you want! *Me*! I'm the Doctor, not him!"

"*Doctor*!" it screeched, not unlike a parrot mimicking a human. As he turned around, the Doctor saw that the hallway he was in also led to the front door. He could see Bob out of the corner of his eye, still running a few feet away. And yet he could sense the Shadow-Walker gaining on him, coming closer and closer…

The Doctor made it all the way to the front door before he realized that the Shadow-Walker had stopped chasing him and Joyce was screaming Bob's name.

Turning around, all the color drained from his face as he realized what was happening. The Shadow-Walker was attacking Bob.

He must have jumped in front of him.

Guilt and grief flooded him even as he and Hopper practically dragged Joyce out of the lab and several more Shadow-Walkers broke down the hallway doors and joined their leader in attacking its victim.

When the Doctor and Hopper finally managed to get Joyce out of the lab and seal the doors behind them, Rose and Mike both started yelling, demanding to know what happened. Hopper was speaking to an inconsolable Joyce, who was still fighting him, trying to get back into the lab. "He's gone!"

The Doctor practically collapsed into Rose's arms, exhausted from being so near to death and the guilt that came with knowing Bob was either dying or dead because of him.

"He jumped right in front of me," he whispered in Rose's ear. "It's my fault."

Rose shut her eyes and let out a sob.

(A/N: To the reviewer who begged me not to kill Bob, I apologize. But this time I made his death a bit...better, I guess is the word. He saved the Doctor's life. Very brave of him, don't you think? It's exactly the kind of thing he'd do. I just feel like his death was necessary for future character development, both

in this fic and in the actual show- especially where Joyce is concerned.)

14. Chapter 14

Chapter 14

Escape Plan

(A/N: I'm actually really proud of this chapter, especially towards the end. So please give feedback; I'd love to know your opinions on my brainchild!)

Time seemed to blur as the Doctor and Rose jumped apart to the sound of a honking horn, shattering the heavy weight hanging in the air. Tires screeched, and suddenly Jonathan was yelling at them from inside Joyce's car. "Come on! Get in!"

Somehow, Joyce, Rose, and the Doctor all managed to clamber into the backseat, although it was a bit cramped. Hopper climbed into his car and drove off as soon as they were far enough in front of him.

As Jonathan drove like his life depended on it, with Nancy in the passenger seat, the Doctor looked out of the window behind them and saw the three boys and Max getting into Hopper's car.

At least they're safe, he thought to himself. He hated to think about what the Shadow-Walkers were probably doing with their newest victim. No matter what choice Bob had made, the Doctor knew that it was still his fault.

Once they made it back to Joyce's house, Hopper laid Will down on the sofa, leaving Nancy and Jonathan to keep vigil over him while Hopper yelled into the phone about the lab. Joyce had retreated to her room and was yet to reappear. The kids were seated at the kitchen table, and Rose stood near them, with the Doctor next to her. The unknown teenager that had been in the passenger seat of Hopper's car paced around the house, until he finally came to a stop in front of the Doctor and Rose.

"So...who are you guys?" he asked.

Dustin spoke up before either of them could. "Oh, this is the Doctor and Rose. The Doc's an alien, and Rose is a human that turned immortal."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow at Dustin, but didn't protest. The newcomer was mixed up in all this whether he liked it or not. The more he knew from the start, the easier it would be for him to understand what was going on.

The teenager's eyes widened as he turned to the Doctor and replied, "Wow. I'm, uh, I'm Steve Harrington, just a normal high school student," he said, chuckling. In turn, the Doctor smiled at him. "Well, nice to meet you. As Dustin said, I'm the Doctor. And this is Rose Tyler." Then, his brow furrowed as he realized that Steve seemed familiar. "Wait, I remember you! I saw you in the hospital; right after Will got lost. Your face was all..." he motioned over his own face with one hand, and Steve smirked.

"Messed up? Yeah, I got in a fistfight with Jonathan. But we're cool now," he put in quickly upon noticing their looks of alarm. "So, what exactly-"

Suddenly, a loud shout from Hopper- who was still yelling into the phone- made them all jump up. "I *am* the police! *Chief* Jim Hopper!" Hopper sighed in frustration. "Yes, the number that I gave you, yes. 6767- I will be here," he snapped, before slamming the phone down onto its wall hook.

"They didn't believe you, did they?" Dustin asked.

Hopper sighed again, replying, "We'll see."

"'*We'll see*'?" Mike echoed. "We can't just sit here while those *things* are loose!"

"We stay here, and we wait for help," Hopper said, his voice low. Turning around, he walked out of the kitchen.

Once he was out of sight, Mike turned his head to glare at the Doctor and Rose. "Why aren't you doing anything about this?" he snapped,

and they both averted his gaze.

A moment later, though, he sighed, and the sharp look in his eyes softened. He cast a mournful glance to the puzzles that were stacked on the living room coffee table- Bob had brought them to the house. Mike stood up and walked into the living room, picking up the blue cube that lay on top of the stack.

"Did you guys know that Bob was the original founder of Hawkins AV?" he asked his friends. Lucas sat up and perked his ears, interested. "Really?"

Mike nodded, turning around to face them. "Yeah. He petitioned the school to start it and everything. Then he had a fundraiser for equipment." As he walked back over to the kitchen table, Mike said, "Mr. Clarke learned everything from him. Pretty awesome, right?"

Dustin and Lucas both nodded in agreement. "Yeah," they said in near-unison.

Mike set the cube down on the table. "We can't let him die in vain."

The Doctor sighed and moved closer to them, Rose still at his side. "Mike, as much as I agree with you, what are we supposed to do?"

Dustin nodded. "Yeah. The Chief's right, you know. We can't stop those Demo-dogs on our own."

"Demo-dogs?" Max piped up from across the table.

"Demogorgon dogs. Demo-dogs," Dustin said. "It's kind of a compound. It's like a play on words, you know, like-"

"-Okay," Max snapped, cutting him off. "And isn't Demogorgon just something you made up? Lucas said that it was really called a Shadow-Walker."

The Doctor nodded. "Yes, that is what it's called. Technically, these are Shadow-Walkers too, but a sort of...subspecies. A derivative, if you will. Like how gray wolves and domestic dogs are technically the same species, but with different characteristics due to their subspecies classification."

Max nodded, shrugging. "Okay. Cool." Then her brow furrowed, and she leaned closer, as if she was studying him. "So, are you *really* an alien? Like, an actual from-another-planet alien?"

The Doctor smirked and nodded. "Yeah, I am."

"You look human, though," she argued. The Doctor replied, "No, no. I don't look human, *you* look Time Lord. Chronologically speaking, we came first."

"T-Time Lord? That's what your species is called?" When the Doctor nodded again, she continued, "Wow, that's totally not pompous at all."

He rolled his eyes. "Look, Max, I didn't make the rules, okay? If anything, I *broke* all of them. Now, how exactly do we stop these creatures without getting killed?" he asked, half to himself.

Dustin sighed and nodded in resignation. "I got nothing, man. I mean, when it was just Dart, maybe. But-"

"Dart?" the Doctor echoed, giving Dustin an inquiring look. Dustin replied, "I found him in my trash. I thought he was some kind of pollywog- y'know, a tadpole- so I kept him. Named him D'artagnan, or Dart for short. But then he got bigger, and I realized he was a baby Demogorgon or Shadow-Walker or whatever you wanna call him."

"And you're *absolutely* a hundred percent sure it's not something else?"

Dustin sighed. "Yeah, I am, dude. Because his face opened up and he ate my cat! Now, as I was saying, when it was just Dart, *maybe* we could've gotten rid of him. But there's an army now."

"*His* army," Mike said suddenly.

Steve tilted his head in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"His army!" Mike repeated. "Maybe if we stop him, we can stop his army, too."

The Doctor's eyes lit up as the children exchanged looks and he said, "Of course! Because the Umbra has a hive mind and it's connected to

the tunnels, the Shadow-Walkers, the other dimension, all of it. It got Will that day on the field, and it's connecting him to everything-"

"-Whoa, whoa, whoa; slow down!" Steve said suddenly, cutting him off. "The hell are you talking about, man?"

The Doctor led him and the other kids to Will's room, picking up his old drawing and setting it down in front of them. "This is the Umbra. Or the shadow monster, depending on who you ask," he said, giving Mike and Dustin a pointed look.

"And if anything that's connected to it feels something like pain, then so would Will. And so would Dustin's, er...pet. Like I said, hive mind."

"Hive mind?" Steve echoed.

"Yeah, a collective consciousness. Like a super-organism. My own *species* had a hive mind and it still took me so long to figure that out about the Umbra! Blimey, that makes me feel like such an idiot. But unlike the Time Lords, this isn't just a bunch of minds interconnected. The Umbra is more like a giant...brain, because it can control everything."

Dustin's head suddenly shot up. "Like the Mind Flayer."

Lucas snapped his fingers and pointed them at Dustin, while Max, Steve, and the Doctor all said in unison, "The...*what*?"

Dustin laid out a large Dungeons and Dragons guidebook on the table, flipping to the right page. "The Mind Flayer."

"What the hell is that?" Hopper asked.

Dustin continued, "It's a monster from am unknown dimension. It's so ancient that it doesn't even know its true home. Okay, it enslaves races of other dimensions by taking over their brains using its highly-developed psionic powers."

Hopper rolled his eyes. "Oh, my God, none of this is real. This is a kids' game."

The Doctor nodded. "Yeah, it is, but so far everything Dustin has said is quite similar, if not exactly like the Umbra. Go on, we're listening."

Dustin grinned. "Thanks, I thought it was a good metaphor-"

"-Analogy," Lucas corrected, and Dustin whipped his head to the side. "Analogy? That's what you're worried about?" Turning back to the Doctor, he continued, "Fine, I thought it was a good *analogy* for describing the Umbra. Also, Doc, this is a *manual*, and it's not for kids."

Nancy piped up, "So this mind flamer thing-"

"-Flayer, Mind Flayer," Dustin interrupted, and Nancy sighed before continuing. "What does it want?"

"To conquer us, basically. It believes it's the master race."

"Like the Germans," Steve added, and Dustin gave him a pointed look. "Uh...the Nazis?"

"Yeah, yeah, the Nazis."

"Um...if the Nazis were from another dimension, totally."

As Dustin spoke, the Doctor turned his head to find Hopper covering his face with his hand in exasperation, which was enough to make him grin. *I really shouldn't be enjoying this*, he thought to himself mischievously.

Then he cleared his throat. "Dustin, if I may..." he tilted his head in an inquiring "I'd like to speak now" motion, and Dustin nodded.

"Oh, yeah. Sorry, man. You're the expert; go right ahead. The mind flayer's part of a game, but you know about the real thing."

The Doctor shook his head dismissively. "Ah, don't apologize. Anyway," he paused for a moment. "The creature we're dealing with, I honestly don't know where it's from. Or if it's part of a species. In my people's history, there was only the one. The Time Lords called it the Umbra, as you could probably gather if you've been listening to me *at all*. Now, the Umbra views other races, like our own, as inferior

to itself. I think the Daleks learned a few tricks from it."

Steve interrupted, "The...Daleks? What are those?"

The Doctor sighed. "They're, in essence, aliens that look like massive pepper pots and yell 'Exterminate'. They are *also* the reason I am the only living member of an otherwise extinct species, and that is all you need to know. Now, back to the subject of the Umbra. It wanted- or, I should say, still wants- to spread and take over the universe. Or, correction, the multiverse. Not just this universe, but all the infinite parallel ones as well. Many, many millennia ago, the Time Lords contained it somehow. I wasn't alive for that, and it was a long time ago, so I don't know details. But what I do know is that there was a lot of work involved. Quite a few of them died and didn't regenerate. From what I can tell, it's still imprisoned, at least partially. But if it gets out..."

"All of that work will be for nothing," Rose finished for him. "An' we won't know how to stop it."

The Doctor nodded solemnly. "Yes, Rose. And that would mean the destruction of this universe, quite possibly others as well."

Steve suddenly straightened himself up to his full height, and started pacing around the room. He said sarcastically, "*That's* great. That's *really* great. Jesus!"

Nancy sighed and turned to the Doctor. "Okay, so, if this is like a brain controlling everything, then if we kill it, we kill everything it controls. We win."

The Doctor sighed and grimaced at her. "Yeah, I like your train of thought, Nancy. But the problem is, I don't know *how* to kill it."

Hopper sighed in frustration, walking over to the kitchen table and picking up the manual. "How do you kill the Mind Flayer? Shoot it with Fireballs or something?"

Dustin shook his head, chuckling. "No, no Fireballs. You, uh, you summon an undead army, because, y'know, zombies, they don't have brains, and the Mind Flayer, it...it likes brains," he said, trailing off as

he realized that Hopper was glaring and the Doctor was smirking at him. "It's just a game. It's a game."

"Then what the hell are we doing here?" Hopper snapped, dropping the manual back onto the table.

"I thought we were waiting for your *military backup*," Dustin shot back.

"We are!"

Mike argued, "But even if they come, how are they gonna stop this? You can't just shoot this with guns!"

"We don't know that!" Hopper yelled back.

The Doctor piped up, "Actually, Hopper, we *do* know that. Its physical body is invulnerable to weapons, from what I know. Its hosts have more limitations, but the main body isn't going to be hurt by a gun. That's what we know."

Mike nodded. "And we know that it's already killed everybody in that lab."

"We know the monsters are gonna molt again," Lucas added, and Dustin concluded, "And we know that it's only a matter of time before those tunnels reach this town!"

Suddenly, a scratchy voice spoke up from the hallway. Joyce. "They're right."

Hopper turned and began to walk closer to her as she said, "We have to kill it. I want to kill it."

"Me too, Joyce, me too," he said calmly. "But we don't exactly know how."

Mike spoke up then. "No, we don't. But he does," he said slowly, walking over to the couch where Will lay unconscious. "If anyone knows how to destroy this thing, it's Will. He's connected to it. He'll know its weakness."

Max said slowly, "But...I thought we couldn't trust him anymore. That he's a spy for the Mind Flayer now."

"Yeah, but...he can't spy if he doesn't know where he is."

The Doctor's eyes widened. "Michael Wheeler, you are a genius!"

What followed was a frantic scramble to clear out the shed behind Joyce's house. Every bit of paper that could be used was taped over each surface. Rose helped everyone else, but the Doctor stayed inside the living room and kept one eye on Will and the other out for impending danger. At one point, he overheard a bit of conversation between Max and Mike as they rummaged around under the sink.

Max said suddenly, "I get why El was your mage now."

El. More guilt rose in his chest at the mention of her name- he had to get back to her as soon as possible.

Mike's reply of "*What*?" broke the Doctor out of his thoughts.

"Lucas," she explained. "He told me all about her."

"Yeah, well, he shouldn't have," he said sullenly. "And just because you know the truth, it doesn't mean you're in our party. You do know that, right?"

Max's reply was ever so slightly hesitant. "Y-Yeah, I know." Then she chuckled. "I mean, why would you want a stupid zoomer in your party anyway? I'm just saying, El? She sounds like she was *really* awesome."

"Yeah, she was," Mike said, a note of...fondness in his voice. "Until that...*thing* took her. Just like it took Bob." Then he slammed the cabinet doors shut, stood up, and walked out.

The stillness that hung in the air told the Doctor that Max had been hurt by Mike's words. Of course, he was angry about El being gone, but that didn't excuse the way he treated her. He made a mental note to remind Mike about the message he had left, and a hint of guilt

resurfaced.

"Max?" he called out, and she jumped up, startled. "Doctor! I...forgot you were in here," she said, laughing nervously.

He smiled at her, chuckling, and a hint of the same expression appeared on her face. "Come over here for a minute, would you?" he said, beckoning her over to the sofa that he was sitting on.

She nodded and moved towards him, sitting down next to him. "Hi," she said awkwardly, averting her gaze.

"Hello," he replied, grinning. The smile dropped from his face, however, when he noticed how tense she was. "Sorry, am I bothering you?"

She shook her head, smiling to herself. "No, no. I just...don't really know what to say. I mean, I don't know you that well. Not like everybody else here does."

He sighed. "Yeah, I know. I just wanted to give you some...advice, for lack of a better word."

Max tilted her head, turning to glance curiously at him. "Advice? Advice about what?"

"Well, mainly, I wanted to tell you not to take what Mike said personally. I can tell he's just...stressed and angry because of a lot of things, and, well...he's lashing out. Happens to everyone at some point."

She nodded, looking back down at the floor. "Yeah, I know what you mean. I can be a real jerk sometimes."

The Doctor chuckled. "Me too, Max. Me too."

Max whipped her head back up and gave him a disbelieving look. "*You*? No way. I mean, you're a loud smartass- no offense- but you are *not* a jerk."

He leaned back against the sofa and smiled. "Well, I appreciate the, er...*compliment*, but like you said, you don't know me that well."

She shrugged. "So? I can tell. You don't *seem* like a jerk. My brother, on the other hand? Now, *there's* a real jerk. Especially since...we moved here from California."

The Doctor could tell that she didn't like talking about her brother that much, so he tried to change the subject. "California, eh? I've been there a few times, it's nice. Bit...warm, for my taste, but I like the ocean."

"Really?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I always liked watching the waves. You should see the beaches on Barcelona- the planet, mind you, not the city in Spain. They're quite impressive. Oh, and the sand is blue."

Max raised an eyebrow skeptically. "Seriously? Blue sand? I don't believe you."

"And yet, you believed I was an alien," he shot back, smirking at her. "I'll prove it to you when all this is over. The beaches on California are *nothing* compared to it."

She sighed, looking back down at her shoes. "I don't really miss it, y'know? Or, more accurately, I *wouldn't*, but my dad's still there, so..."

The Doctor tilted his head at that. "Really? Why?"

Max turned back to glance at him and gave him a sardonic look. "There's this legal process known as 'divorce'. See, when two married people don't love each other anymore..." She gave him a pointed look, and he nodded in understanding. "Yeah. Right. Sorry if I pried too much."

She shook her head. "No, it's fine. I kinda...trust you, I guess. I'm not sure why, except that you...remind me of him, a little bit. My dad, I mean," she clarified. "He would've liked you. You're both science geeks."

Max paused, sighing. "But my mom and my stepdad, they wanted...a fresh start away from him. They think *he* was the problem, which is total bull. And it made things...worse, now. I mean, my brother- well, actually, he's my stepbrother- has always been an asshole, but now

he's just...angry all the time, and, well, he can't take it out on my mom, so...he takes it out on me." She said this all very bitterly, shrugging, so the Doctor sighed and put his hand on her shoulder.

She flinched slightly, startled, but didn't move away from him. "I'm really sorry, Max," he murmured. "It always bothers me when I see kids like you having to deal with things like that. If there's anything I can do-"

He stopped when she shook her head. "You don't have to fix anything. I dunno why I told you all that, anyway. I told Lucas, too, and I'm not sure why I told him, either." She paused, thinking for a moment. "I guess because...it's nice having someone to talk to. And I trust you and Lucas. All things considered, he's been pretty nice to me. You have, too."

Then, she turned to face him and smirked. "Okay, subject change. Rose is...human, right? When he nodded, she continued. "Well, then why did Lucas and Dustin both say she was immortal?"

"That is a very long story, Max. When our lives aren't in danger, maybe she'll tell it. The short version, though, is that her biology was changed because of something she did, and has been that way ever since."

Max stayed silent as she thought that over. "Well, that's neat," she said finally. Then she smiled. "So, is she really your girlfriend? Or is that like, a cover or something?"

The Doctor half nodded, then shrugged. "I'm too old to be anybody's boyfriend, Max. But we're...together, in that sense."

She raised an eyebrow. "Why? I mean, I'm not judging you, it's just that she's human, and you're, well..."

He chuckled. "I get your point. And to answer your question, we're together because I'm in love with her. And at this point, I think it's alright for me to assume that she feels the same way about me."

Max sighed, smiling to herself. "Love really *is* weird. No offense."

"Ah, none taken," the Doctor replied. "You know, you're right. It is

weird. And try to hold off on falling in love for as long as you can, kid. It does things to you."

Max rolled her eyes, then quipped, "Whatever you say...*Doc*."

The Doctor genuinely laughed then, for the first time since Will had been found standing catatonic in the school field. "Oi, not you too," he groaned, practically collapsing against the sofa. "There's no respect in that!"

Max laughed too. "Well, *I* think it's affectionate. Mike, Dustin, and Lucas...they call you Doc because they *like* you. It's a nickname, like Max is for me."

He raised an eyebrow at that, sitting back up. "I thought Max *was* your name."

She shook her head. "Well, my real name is Maxine. I just go by Max. Or Mad Max, according to the Dig Dug arcade machine."

"Wait a minute. Will told me something about that, actually," he murmured, smiling at the memory. "He said you got, what was it, seven hundred and fifty thousand points on that game? That's...I don't usually say this, but that's pretty impressive."

Max laughed again. "Oh my God, you're such a weirdo! Weird...nerd," she teased. "But thanks. For the compliment." Then she switched to some sort of posh voice- one that the Doctor realized, somewhat to his annoyance, was an intentionally terrible imitation of an English accent. "I must admit that my skills are quite formidable," she joked, unable to keep a straight face as she finished her sentence, making both of them collapse into laughter.

When they had both calmed down and composed themselves, Max said, "I think I like hanging out with you, Doc. You're kinda cool. Weird, but cool."

The Doctor grinned. "You seem pretty cool yourself...Mad Max. When all this is over, I think we'll get along just fine."

As she grinned back at him, an ache suddenly surfaced in his chest as he realized how much she reminded him of El. They had a similar

smile, and El often called him weird. And they were both angry about things, and were probably lonely, too.

Suddenly, the back door opened, breaking him out of his thoughts. Hopper. "There you are, Max. We almost started looking for you until Lucas said you hadn't come out of here. The shed's ready, guys." He paused, sighing. "Time to wake Will up."

(A/N: I know I stole a bit of dialogue in Max's scene with the Doctor from her conversation with Lucas, but I altered their discussion enough that it wouldn't really feel like plagiarism. I didn't really anticipate that conversation; it kind of just...happened. But I'm glad it did. Remember, Doc, adopting one kid means adopting all her friends, too. It's a package deal. And on that note, I plan on changing up El's relationship with Max a bit. Less...attitude on the former's end.)

15. Chapter 15

Chapter 15

A Spy and a Savior

The Doctor stepped inside the wooden tool shed, and was shocked to see what it looked like from the inside. Cardboard and paper scraps covered every inch of the walls, and more cardboard was taped to the chairs that were in the center of the room, directly across from each other. One was empty, and the other had an unconscious, tide up Will slumped over on top of it. A bright light shone in his face, undoubtedly obscuring some of his vision. *Seems extreme*, the Doctor thought to himself. *Then again, it might just be the only chance we've got.*

"All right, you ready?" Hopper whispered to Joyce, and she nodded. "Yeah."

Hopper shook up the bottle of ammonia he was holding, then moved to crouch down in front of Will. He took a cotton ball, soaked it with the liquid, then held it directly beneath Will's nose.

Almost immediately, Will's eyes flew open and he sat back up, gasping.

Inside the house, Dustin paced around nervously and Nancy was leaning against the wall while Steve practiced with his baseball bat in the other room. Lucas walked over to where Max was sitting- up against the wall in the hallway where Will's room was- and sat down across from her.

Max said, "If he finds out where we are...will he send those dogs after us?"

"He won't find out," Lucas replied firmly.

"Yeah, but *if* he does?"

Lucas sighed. "Judgment day."

Will's deep brown eyes darted back and forth across the room, and he began to struggle against his restraints. "What? What...what is this? *What is this*?" he exclaimed. "Why am I tied up?"

Joyce walked forward and crouched down in front of him. "Will, we just wanna talk to you. We're not gonna hurt you."

"Where am I?" he demanded, looking around wildly.

Hopper bent down on the other side of him, then held up his old drawing. "Do you recognize this?"

Will shook his head rapidly, and Joyce murmured, "Hey. We wanna help you. But to do that, we have to understand how to kill it."

"Why am I tied up? *Why am I tied up*?" Will began screeching that sentence over and over, still struggling as Joyce and Hopper tried to calm him. As his yelling grew louder, the floodlight began flickering. "Let me go! *Let me go*!"

Hopper held him in a viselike grip for several seconds, until his yelling tapered off and he stopped fighting. "Go..." he murmured weakly. Joyce was still crouched in front of him, biting her lip. Will was now partially slumped over, his eyes hollow.

Joyce sighed. "Do you know what March 22nd is?" When Will said nothing, she answered, "It's your birthday. *Your* birthday."

The Doctor may have imagined it, but just for a moment, he saw Will's eyes brighten a bit as Joyce kept talking. He knew what she was doing- bringing up an old memory that had emotion attached to it to try and draw him out of where he was. Will was still there, just repressed, and somehow Joyce *knew* that. Very clever of her, if not downright brilliant.

"When you turned eight, I gave you that huge box of crayons. Do you remember that? It was...a hundred and twenty colors. And all your friends, they got you *Star Wars* toys, but all you wanted to do was draw with all your new colors. And you drew this big spaceship, but

it wasn't from a movie. No, it was your spaceship. A rainbow ship is what you called it. And you...you must have used every color in the box," she murmured, smiling slightly even as her voice broke. "I took that with me to Melvald's, and I put it up, and I told everyone who came in, 'My son drew this'. And you were so embarrassed." She paused, letting out a shaky laugh. "But I was so proud. I was so, *so* proud."

Rose bit her lip as tears threatened to spill over, and the Doctor's eyes were full of pain as he looked at them. She really *loved* her son, that was quite easy to see. Much like...his own mother, who probably would've done for him what Joyce was doing for Will now.

Suddenly, Jonathan- who was standing next to them in the corner- drew in a shuddering breath and asked, "Do you remember the day Dad left?" Will turned his head to look at Jonathan as he moved closer and bent down in front of him. "We stayed up all night building Castle Byers...just the way you drew it."

He paused, chuckling slightly. "And it took *so* long because you were so bad at hammering." Both Joyce and Jonathan laughed slightly at that. "You'd miss the nail every time. And then it started raining, but we stayed out there anyway. We were both sick for like a week after that. But we just *had* to finish it, didn't we? We just had to."

As he said this, Will's hand twitched and he stretched out his fingers. *He's in there and it's working*, the Doctor realized. *This is bloody* working*!*

"Do you remember the first day that we met?" Mike spoke up, a tear rolling down his face. "It was...it was the first day of kindergarten. I knew nobody. I had no friends, and..." he paused, sniffling. "I just felt so alone, and so *scared*, but...I saw you on the swings, and you were alone, too. You were just swinging by yourself. So I just walked up to you, and...I asked. I asked if you wanted to be my friend. And you said yes. You said yes," he murmured. "It was the best thing I've *ever* done."

Will's lower lip trembled, and he opened his mouth slightly. He was fighting against the force that held him captive in his own body.

Suddenly, Rose stepped forward and knelt down. "Do you remember me, Will?" she asked, her voice breaking. "Do you remember when I first found you? You were curled up in a ball, lying on the ground in that other dimension. I had been there for two days, and I was weak myself. Not because of the air or because I was hurt or anything, but because I was *ready to give up*. Trapped in a place I didn't know, thinking that I'd never see the Doctor or anyone else I cared about ever again...I was ready to just lay down and die and never come back. But then..." Her lip trembled, and tears spilled from her eyes. "I found you, Will. *You*. I took you with me, nursed you back to health as best I could. And then...you talked to me. Told me stories. About your mum and your brother and all your friends. So I told you about the Doctor."

Rose smiled at him and wiped her eyes. "You begged me to tell you about every single adventure we went on. You thought all of it was just so *cool*. Remember the time I told you about when we went to 1879 and met a werewolf? That story was your favorite. And...blimey, for the first time in a long time, I felt happy. *Happy*, even though we were trapped in a terrifying parallel world," she said, her eyes widening as she said this. "I love you, Will. The same way I would if you were my own son. An'...yeah, I saved your life, but in a way, you also saved *mine*."

A tear rolled down Will's cheek.

Joyce leaned over and whispered, "Will, baby...if you're in there, just...please, *please* talk to us. Please, honey. Can you do that for me? *Please*. I love you so much."

Will shut his eyes, and his lip trembled as he tried to open his mouth. He was still fighting. Suddenly, though, his shaky breathing evened out and his expression went blank. After a long pause, he said, "Let me go."

Joyce's face fell and she sighed, while the Doctor turned his head away. Then, his eyes fell on Will's side. He was tapping the underside of the chair with two fingers.

As the Doctor strained his ears to listen, his eyes narrowed. The rhythm of the tapping was familiar, but he couldn't quite put his

finger on it, until he remembered a moment later in a flash of clarity.

Morse code. And it was no surprise, either- it was definitely possible for a kid as smart as Will to know Morse code.

Which is why the Doctor motioned for everyone to follow him and ran back into the house.

When he all but burst in, the Doctor immediately started fumbling around, trying to find a paper and pen. "What happened?" Dustin asked.

In answer, the Doctor sat down at the table and started writing down the code, or at least what he remembered of it. "I think he's talking, just not with words," he replied. "I'd look inside his mind if I could, but the last time I tried that, the Umbra almost mentally attacked me."

Six dots. A dash. Two more dots. "W-What is that?" Steve asked as he leaned over to watch. The boys replied in unison, "Morse code."

"H-E-R-E," the Doctor said, writing it down. "Here. Will's still in there," he murmured. "He's talking to us."

A few minutes later, everyone had gone back into the shed, with the exception of Rose, the kids, Steve, and Nancy. Jonathan had grabbed his boom box and put a cassette tape inside it, pressing play when the door was shut. *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* started playing as Jonathan- along with nearly everyone else- talked to Will. Hopper kept his ears open so he could relay the code to the boys via a walkie-talkie.

"Do you remember the first time I played you this? Mom and Dad were both arguing in the next room. So I played you the mix tape I made you. And it was the first time you got into music. *Real* music." Jonathan.

"And then the party escaped into the sewers. And there were those big insect things, and you guys were still on level one. You cast Fog

Cloud and you saved us. You saved the whole party." Mike.

"You saw that little girl, and she was in the sandbox, and she was crying. You gave her your Tonka truck, and I told you we couldn't afford to buy another one. You said she should have it because she's sad. 'She's sad, Mommy'." Joyce. "I love you so much. So, *so* much."

Then, the shrill ring of a telephone emanated, and Will's had jerked up towards the source of the sound. "Oh, no," the Doctor murmured. Will's breathing became labored, and eyes rolled back into his head and started moving from side to side. "It knows. It knows where we are," Hopper said.

"Oh, shit," Joyce swore, before grabbing the syringe that she had filled earlier and jabbing it in his shoulder. He slumped over, unconscious, but the Doctor knew it had been a moment too late.

He ran outside the shed with Hopper, Mike, and Jonathan. Not a moment later, the distant screeching of Shadow-Walkers cut through the night air. They spun around and burst back in, while Jonathan exclaimed, "They're coming! We have to go!"

Hopper and the Doctor made quick work of undoing Will's restraints, while Joyce picked him back up as they moved back towards the house. Hopper made a quick detour to grab an old hunting rifle.

When the Doctor ran back in, he found Rose instructing the kids to get away from the windows. "Oi, get back."

The door slammed shut as Hopper ran in, the rifle in one hand and a machine gun in the other. Holding up the rifle, he asked Jonathan, "Do you know how to use this?'

"W-What?"

"*Can you use this?*"

Nancy answered before Jonathan could. "*I* can." Hopper, in turn, threw it to her, and she caught and pointed it easily.

The Doctor stood just behind Hopper, Nancy, and Steve- all of whom were armed with some sort of weapon. Rose was at his side, and even

though she was doing her best to hide it, the Doctor could tell she was terrified. He reached down and squeezed her hand reassuringly.

We'll be fine, love, he told her mentally, and she gave him an almost imperceptible nod. *If you say so.*

The growling grew a bit louder, and Max asked, frightened, "Where are they?"

Suddenly, loud snarls and thudding emanated, and everyone turned to the side, facing the source of the sound- near the dining room window. "What are they doing?" Nancy said.

Suddenly, a loud groan echoed near the front window, followed by a breathy screech. However, the screeching abruptly stopped after a moment, cut off by something similar to a high-pitched whine.

After a moment of tense silence, the body of a Shadow-Walker came flying through the window. It landed in the corner of the room, on its side, as if it had been thrown rather than jumped through on its own accord. Everyone screamed and yelled as their nerves were stretched thin. Rose let out a shriek and nearly fell over backwards, stopped from doing so only because the Doctor managed to catch her.

The screaming stopped when they all moved closer and realized the Shadow-Walker wasn't moving. "Holy shit," Dustin gasped out, while Max asked, "Is it dead?"

The Doctor crept closer to it and nudged its head with his boot. It moved back due to force, but flopped back over when he moved his foot away. He nodded slowly. "Yeah. Yeah, I think so."

But that made no sense to him- that subspecies was known for being good at hunting, much like a pack of wolves. So what could have possibly killed it?

He didn't have time to wonder, however, as the front door started creaking. Everyone spun around, and Hopper and Nancy pointed their guns at the door, ready to shoot.

The lock turned, seemingly on its own. Then, the chain slid back and fell. The door was unlocked from the inside. The Doctor started

thinking to himself that now was probably a *very* good time to panic when the door creaked open.

Oh.

Standing in the doorway was a young girl with slicked-back dark hair and deep brown eyes, a black shirt and jacket, jeans and a pair of white converse, with a trickle of blood coming from her nose.

Eleven.

(A/N: On to the last episode! Oh, and just so you know: the Doctor and Rose's reunion with El is probably gonna make you cry.)

16. Chapter 16

Chapter 16

Reunions and Separations

(A/N: The long-awaited reunion! Not gonna lie, this was self-indulgent for me. I've been wanting to do that scene since I watched The Gate for the first time. Lots of feels both familial and romantic. I had to purge it from my system. Also, have a few more Doctor/Rose and Mike/El parallels.)

The Doctor and Rose both watched, transfixed, as El moved closer to them while Mike pushed in front of everyone to see her. Smiles slowly appeared on their faces, and El's eyes brimmed with hope.

The look on her face was the same sort of hopeful look the Doctor knew he had given Rose all those years ago, standing across from each other on a dark road. Their faces had lit up as they ran towards each other, and he had been desperate to reach her.

It was oddly, almost painfully similar to what Mike and El were doing now. He stepped close to her, murmuring her name. "Eleven."

She said his name back, before throwing her arms around him. She let out a shuddering breath, hugging him as tightly as she could while he buried his face in her shoulder as silent tears streamed down his face. In the background, Max whispered to Lucas and Dustin, "Is that..." and they nodded.

After a few moments, he pulled away from her embrace, but kept his arms around her. A small smile appeared on his face as he said, "I never gave up on you. I called you every night. Every night for-"

"-Three hundred and fifty-three days," she finished for him in a whisper, shaking her head. "I heard."

Mike's face fell in shock, and he stepped back ever so slightly. "Why

didn't you tell me you were there? That you were okay?"

Those questions were enough to break the Doctor out of his trance that was due to the shock of seeing El. Sighing, he stepped closer to them and murmured, "Because I wouldn't let her."

Then, he turned to face El, who had pulled away from Mike when he spun around to look at the Doctor. She met his gaze squarely as he bent down. "What...where have you been?" he asked, his eyes searching.

El stepped closer to him and shot back, "Where have *you* been?" and he wrapped both his arms around her, resting his chin on top of her head.

A moment later, El let out a choked sob. The Doctor's eyes widened and he moved away just enough to look at her as her breathing grew shaky and tears fell from her eyes. Before he could even ask her what was wrong, she whimpered, "I'm sorry."

"No, love, don't apologize," he murmured, framing her face in his hands. "You're here. You're here and you're safe, and that's all that matters." He leaned forward and kissed the top of her head, closing his eyes. "Shh...it's alright."

"You've been hiding her," Mike said suddenly, whirling on him. "You've been hiding her this whole time!" he nearly shouted, moving forward with clear intent to hit him.

The Doctor turned around and stood up very quickly, catching Mike off-guard. He put a firm hand on Mike's shoulder and exclaimed, "Oi! Let's *talk*, alright? *Alone*." Mike rolled his eyes, but let the Doctor lead him into the other room and close the door.

Rose finally moved forward, embracing El the same way the Doctor had. "Hey, honey," she whispered, smiling. El put her head on Rose's shoulder, a bittersweet smile spreading over her face. "I missed you," she murmured.

Meanwhile, Mike was in the process of directing every bit of his

anger at the Doctor. "Protecting her! *Protecting her*?!"

"Listen, Mike," the Doctor said slowly. "The more people know about her, the more danger she's in. And the more danger you and your family are in-"

"-Oh, what, so I should be *thanking* you?!" Mike yelled, and the Doctor sighed and snapped, "I'm not asking you to *thank* me, Michael! I'm asking you to try to understand."

Mike shook his head vehemently, waving his arm back and forth. "I don't! I *don't* understand!"

"That's fine, that's *perfectly* fine! Just *do not* blame her! All right? She's upset enough as it is."

"I don't blame her; I blame you! *I blame you*!" Mike yelled back, his voice going slightly hoarse. In response, the Doctor shook his head and sighed. "That's okay, Mike. That's okay. But don't act like I didn't *try* to help both of you! Not only did I keep her safe, I left you a bloody *note*! I made sure that you would know she was alive! But you didn't...read it, did you?" he said, his voice lowering as he asked that question.

Mike froze where he stood, his eyes wide. "No," he said flatly. "I didn't. I got rid of it because I assumed you were apologizing or something." After a long pause, he muttered, "Sorry."

"It's okay," the Doctor replied, and Mike shook his head. "No, it's not," he said, his voice shaking. "*Nothing* about this is okay." As he said that, tears started rolling down his face.

On instinct, the Doctor stepped forward and hugged Mike in one swift move, who didn't protest- only buried his face in the Doctor's shirt and wept.

As he comforted Mike, the Doctor couldn't help but feel sorry for him. He'd been missing her all this time, unaware that she was alive and well. True, the latter part of that was due to his own actions, but the Doctor wasn't about to blame him for that. "You're okay, Mike. You're okay." He paused, sighing. "I'm sorry."

El, meanwhile, was being hugged by both Dustin and Lucas at the same time. "We missed you," Lucas said, and El replied, "I missed you, too."

Dustin nodded in agreement. "Yeah, we talked about you pretty much every day."

When they both pulled away from her, El reached out and poked Dustin in the mouth. "Teeth."

"What?"

"You have teeth," she replied, smirking slightly, and Dustin grinned and nodded again. "Oh. You like these pearls?" he asked, opening his mouth and making an odd purring sound. El chuckled.

"Eleven?" Max suddenly piped up, and El turned to look at her as she walked over. "Hey. Um, I'm Max. I've heard a lot about you," she said, sticking out her hand.

El knew who this girl was- she had been in the gym with Mike the day she saw him, laughing as she circled him with her skateboard. Her first instinct was to be jealous and ignore her, but then she remembered Rose's advice- to always be kind to everyone, no matter what. And she could see Rose giving her a "be nice" look out of the corner of her eye, almost as if she *knew*.

So, if a little begrudgingly, El took the offered hand and shook it, allowing herself a small smile. "Hi."

Max grinned. "Lucas told me how you flipped a van with your mind. That seems really awesome; I wish I could've seen it."

El shrugged, still smiling. Then she walked past her to hug Joyce, who laughed and murmured, "Hey. Hey, sweetheart." When she pulled away from Joyce, El asked, "Can I see him?"

She was, of course, referring to Will.

Joyce, in turn, led her to Will's room, where he lay unconscious in his bed. As they both bent down to look at him, Joyce whispered, "He's not doing well."

El nodded solemnly. "I know. I saw."

"W-What else did you see?"

El didn't answer right away- rather, she walked into the kitchen, where a piece of cardboard sat on the table. It had Will's instruction printed on it- the way to stop the Umbra.

CLOSE GATE

Joyce's eyes widened when she saw it, and everyone else walked in their direction as she asked, "You opened this gate before, right?" When El nodded, she said, "Do you think that if we got you back there, you could close it?"

After a long silence, El sighed and nodded again. "Yes."

Everyone was gathered around the kitchen table, intrigued by what El had said. The Doctor, however, sighed and put his hand on the table, leaning across it to meet El's gaze. "Look, the gate isn't like it was before. It's grown. A lot. And that's not considering if we can even get in there- the place is crawling with Shadow-Walkers.

"I can do it," she said firmly, and the Doctor sighed in frustration. "You're not hearing me, Jane."

El shook her head. "I'm hearing you. I can do it."

"Even if El can, there's still another problem," Mike piped up. "If the brain dies, the body dies."

"That's the whole point," the Doctor said, confused, and Mike continued, "It is, but if we're really right about this...I mean, if El closes the gate and kills the Umbra's army..."

"-Will's a part of that army," Lucas murmured, realizing. Mike nodded. "Closing the gate will kill him."

A silence fell over the room as everyone mulled that over, until Joyce got to her feet and motioned for them to follow her.

When they reached Will's room, Joyce stood in the doorway for a silent moment, breaking it when she looked over at the open window and said, "He likes it cold."

"What?" Hopper asked, confused.

"It's what Will kept saying to me. 'He likes it cold'." Joyce moved over to the window and slammed it shut. "We keep giving it what it wants."

The Doctor suddenly exclaimed, "Wait a minute. Will's body temperature dropped drastically after that day in the field. Maybe the Umbra can only inhabit other bodies that are under a certain temperature. Maybe...maybe Doctor Owens was right, to some extent. It *is* like a virus, because Will is the host. And how does one get rid of a virus? You *make the host uninhabitable*. So if he likes it cold-"

"-We need to burn it out of him," Joyce finished for him, and the Doctor nodded. "Exactly. Oh, you really *are* brilliant, Joyce!"

Before she could say anything in reply, Mike spoke up. "We have to do it somewhere he doesn't know this time." Dustin nodded in agreement. "Yeah, somewhere far away."

Hopper sighed. "I know where we need to go."

Just before Hopper left the house to take Nancy, Jonathan, and Joyce to his old cabin, the Doctor held up the radio he had been given. "Listen, Hopper, you let me know when that thing is out of him. Alright?"

Hopper nodded. Then, the Doctor turned to Rose. "I think you should go with them."

Rose sighed and shook her head. "As much as I want to, I can't. 'M gonna stay here with Steve and keep an eye on the kids. We're both pretty damn good at babysitting," she said, allowing herself a small smile. Hopper nodded a goodbye and walked out the door once he knew for sure that she wasn't coming.

Rose smiled at the Doctor after they left. "You're taking El to close the

gate, aren't you?" When he nodded, she continued, sniffling. "I suppose there's no point in trying to keep you from being the hero, is there?"

The Doctor shook his head, smiling slightly at her. "No. But I'll be okay, Rose. You know I will," he murmured. "I'm always okay."

A tear fell from Rose's eye and she choked out, her voice thick with emotion, "I really don't want to lose you. Please, for the love of God, *be careful*. Can you do that?"

He nodded, smiled lovingly at her. "For you and El? I'd do anything." Leaning forward, he took her face in his hands and kissed her gently. She wrapped her arms around him and kept her lips pressed to his for a long moment, sighing when he pulled away. "I love you," she blurted out without thinking. The Doctor grinned and replied, "And I love you, Rose Tyler."

Mike and El were outside, so they didn't see the Doctor and Rose's exchange. The other kids and Steve, however, did. They stood awkwardly in the living room entryway, unnoticed by the two.

At least, unnoticed until the Doctor's concluding words, as Lucas gagged immediately afterwards, and Dustin covered his face and yelled, "My eyes!"

Rose sighed in frustration and chuckled, despite the weight that hung in the room. "Why is it that whenever we get interrupted, it's always you two?" When they said nothing, the Doctor kissed the top of Rose's head and murmured "See you soon," before walking away and exiting the house through the back door. Hopper had left his van in the driveway for the Doctor to use- they had taken Joyce's car to the cabin.

Meanwhile, Mike had just said something to El that was almost an echo of the Doctor's conversation with Rose. "Just be careful, alright? I *can't* lose you again."

El shook her head with certainty- a trait she had picked up from her guardians, who were both very stubborn. "You won't lose me."

"Do you promise?"

El nodded. "Promise." When she saw how worried he still looked, she tried to reassure him. Leaning forward, she tried to press her lips to his, but was interrupted by the Doctor calling out to her. "Oi! El, it's time for us to go."

They both sighed deeply, then she turned around and walked off in his direction. She climbed into the passenger seat as he started the engine, looking over her shoulder as he drove away.

She saw the faces of her friends and the woman she had decided to call a mother watching them leave, clearly awaiting their return.

I'll come back, she vowed to herself. *We both will. I'll make sure of that.*

(A/N: So, I know this is kind of a plothole, but let's assume Hopper's cabin was already cleaned up for a different reason. Maybe he decided to live in it some of the time or something. I would've mentioned it to resolve the hole, but there hardly seemed an appropriate place to do so.)

17. Chapter 17

Chapter 17

Questions and Answers

(A/N: Interlude, pure and simple. The conversation between the Doctor and El on the drive to Hawkins lab, which somehow added up to over 2,700 words. Line breaks occur whenever the POV switches- i.e. whenever whose head we're looking inside changes. That's the best way I can explain it. Enjoy!)

Hopper's van drove steadily down the road, while El kept her eyes on the horizon in front of her. She glanced at the Doctor whenever he wasn't looking, noticing the way his eyes kept flitting nervously down to the machine gun in the floorboard- Hopper had insisted he take it. But whenever he turned to look at her- something else he did repeatedly- El's gaze remained fixed on the windshield. He said nothing, so she also kept silent.

As they neared their destination, however, the Doctor finally spoke up. "So, we're just not gonna talk about it, huh?"

El rolled her eyes and sighed, still staring straight ahead. "About what?"

From the corner of her eye, she saw the Doctor take both of his hands off the steering wheel for a brief moment, then set them back down in frustration. "I dunno. Maybe why you're dressed like that. Or why you showed up when you did." He sighed. "El...I'm not mad, alright? I just want to know where you've been. That's all."

Even as she turned to the right to look out the window, El could feel the Doctor's eyes trained on her. After a moment's pause, she replied, "I saw Mama."

His head turned very quickly back in the direction of the road. When El gave him a brief glance, she saw the shock written all over the

Doctor's face. His next words came out slowly and deliberately, like he was trying to keep his emotions out of his voice. "Okay. You...went to your mother's house, I'm assuming. How exactly...did you get there?"

As he asked that question, he looked back at her again, and she turned away. "A truck."

"A truck?" he echoed, and his eyes widened.

"A big truck," she replied, as if for clarity.

The Doctor, meanwhile, found himself at a bit of a loss for words. She wouldn't look at him when he spoke, almost out of defiance. And it was all he could do to keep his emotions and instincts in check- he didn't want a repeat of their last conversation. So he asked the only thing he could think of. "A big truck? Whose truck was it?"

Her reply of "A man's," only made him more worried and shocked- a little angry, even. But she didn't need to know about that. "A man's," he repeated.

"A nice man," she shot back, and the Doctor could have yelled at her.

But he didn't. He didn't yell, because he reminded himself that she, despite being thirteen years old, hardly knew any better. That wasn't her fault- she was raised as a lab experiment and wasn't taught just how dangerous the outside world was. Of *course* she was unaware that she took a very big risk. How was she supposed to know that her story sounded like the beginning of every parent's worst nightmare?

Now where had *that* thought come from? Forcing himself to focus on the matter at hand, the Doctor said, "All right, so, let me just get this straight in my head. A nice man in a big truck, he drove you to your mum's house. Then what, your aunt Becky gave you those clothes and that makeup? I don't think so. Where else did you go?"

He turned his head to look at her again. She didn't immediately turn the other way, but her eyes dropped to the floor- guilt. "I shouldn't have left," she murmured, and the Doctor suddenly felt very, very

guilty- probably more guilty than she felt.

He sighed. "Maybe not, but...this isn't on you, El. I- well, we- should've been there for you. Although that's more my fault than Rose's. And I should never have lied to you about your mum. Or about when you could come back here. Lot of things I shouldn't have done," he murmured.

The Doctor let out a heavy sigh. "Sometimes I feel like...a black hole, or something. Remember when I told you about those?"

El nodded, so he kept talking. "Yeah, they pull everything towards their center and destroy whatever they get ahold of. I have a tendency to hurt those closest to me." He paused, and a memory suddenly came to him- a good memory. He chuckled softly as he recalled a different dark-haired girl, who called him Grandfather. "Susan was always fascinated by black holes. She often tried to see just how close the TARDIS could get to one."

From the corner of his eye, he saw El tilt her head in confusion. "Susan? Who's that?"

He sighed again, a distant look in his eyes. "That's right, you don't know. Well, you wouldn't- I never told you about her." He paused, trying to think of the best way to describe his first traveling companion. "Susan was my granddaughter. She was the first person I ever traveled with, and she helped me quite a bit. I taught her almost everything I knew." The Doctor smiled as he thought back to the time he had with her. "Blimey, was she clever. Smarter than me, most likely. Much smarter." He paused for a long moment. "She was the reason I started bringing humans along with me. And she was very kind- you would've liked each other, I'm sure."

"Where is she?" El asked.

The Doctor didn't answer her for several moments, swallowed the lump that had formed in his throat. "Well, that's kind of the thing, El. She, uh...she left me. First because she belonged somewhere else, where she was happier than when she traveled with me. Then she just...left. During the Time War."

El sighed, seeming to understand his implication. "Gone."

"Yeah," he murmured. "She's gone. That black hole...it got her. And...I've just been scared. Scared that it would take you too. I think that's why I was so angry after that first time you left. I was afraid I'd lose you." The Doctor shut his eyes for a brief moment. "I remember, one time, I told you that everyone is afraid of something. And you asked if I was, too. Well...that's what I'm afraid of. Losing you and Rose. Because when you...love someone, you get scared of losing them."

Finally, *finally*, she turned to meet his gaze. "You...you love me?"

He raised an eyebrow, more than a little shocked by her question. How could she not know how much he loved and cared for her? "Well...yeah. Of course I do. I love you, El. And I'm...I'm sorry. About pretty much everything. I was so...so..."

"-Stupid?" she finished for him, a small smile spreading over her face. He laughed softly.

"Yep. I was stupid," he murmured. "Just...*really* stupid."

El shrugged, as if it couldn't possibly matter. When she spoke again, he knew why. "I've been stupid, too."

"I guess we broke our rule," he teased, grinning. She grinned right back. Then he changed the subject.

"I don't hate it, by the way. This…look," he said, nodding at her outfit. "It's kinda cool." He smirked.

El turned to look ahead of her, and repeated the word Kali had used. "Bitchin'."

The Doctor raised an eyebrow at that remark. He had to laugh, though, even as he asked her, "All right, who told you that?" When she said nothing in reply- only shrugged- he continued, his tone slightly more serious. "Don't repeat that. That's...how do I explain it...that's what's called a swear word. You may have heard your friends or even heard Rose say a few of those, but usually it's not a good idea to swear. Especially at your age. So don't do it, okay?"

She stayed silent, so the Doctor leaned over to whisper something in her ear, a huge grin on his face. "But just between you and me, I think that's an excellent word to describe your outfit."

That did exactly what he hoped it would- for the first time since she came back to him, El laughed. Loudly and for a long while. It was enough to make him laugh, too.

When they had both stopped laughing and caught their breaths, it was silent for a few moments, until El spoke up.

"Doctor?"

She needed something. Whenever she said his name out of nowhere, it was important. "Hm? What is it?"

He definitely wasn't prepared for the question she asked him- in fact, he nearly lost his grip on the steering wheel.

"Is Rose my mom?"

The Doctor wasn't quite sure how to respond. After a long pause, he finally stammered out, "W-What exactly do you mean by that, El?"

El sighed. "I know she's not my real mom. But...last year, when we were all at the school, Mike told me that Rose would be like my new mom if I stayed with you. Is she?"

He raised an eyebrow, drew in a long breath. "Well...that depends, I suppose. Do you...want her to be your mother? Or do you think of her that way?"

She nodded. "Yeah, kind of. She acts like my mom...I think. I don't really know what having a mom is like. But I don't think it's that different."

Well, *that* was a first. But as he thought about it, the Doctor was less and less surprised by what El said about Rose. After all, hadn't he told Rose several days ago that she insisted on mothering every child she came across? And El had been living with them for almost a year, with no one else looking after her. Of course Rose would become the closest thing El had to a mother- there was no one else around to do

that.

So, he chuckled softly and replied, "If you want her to be your mother, then...yeah. I suppose she is."

El smiled. Then she asked, "Should I call her 'mom'?"

Oh. Another tricky question. The Doctor just shrugged, thought for a moment. "Again, that depends on what you want. If you're not comfortable with calling her that, then you don't have to. But if you ever decide you want to do that, you might want to give Rose a little advance warning. She wouldn't be mad or anything- in fact, I think she'd be quite flattered. But I wouldn't catch her off-guard if I were you."

If El was confused by his answer, she did nothing to show it. Rather, she just replied, "Okay."

They spent a minute or so in companionable silence, but El started talking again after that. And what she said nearly made him drive the car off the road.

"If Rose is like my mom, then are *you* like my dad?"

Well. He had definitely not expected that. Her thinking of Rose as a mother was one thing, but this was very different. Did she think of him as…

A not-so-small part of him secretly hoped she did, although he knew that wasn't likely. He wasn't the parental figure type. Not the way Rose was.

The Doctor let out a sigh. "Again, that depends on what you want."

El had been doing a lot of thinking. About her guardians, in particular. But she couldn't understand why the Doctor had been so shocked when she asked him about Rose. Or about himself. It was a simple question- were they her new parents or not?

He had told her that depended on if she wanted them to be like that to her. How could she *not* want that?

And then she thought of her real mother, trapped inside her own mind, and suddenly felt very guilty.

Oh. *That* was why he had asked her.

But her mother had also wanted her to be taken care of. Maybe she had showed her the image of Kali out of more than concern for the other girl- maybe she had known Kali could help her.

Was it so wrong for her to want a relatively normal life with two parents?

Half of her said that no, it wasn't, it was perfectly normal, while the other half said that she'd be abandoning her real mother if she chose to think of the Doctor and Rose as her family.

"El?" came the Doctor's kind voice, breaking her out of her thoughts. "You don't have to answer me right away. You probably don't know that you think of me," he said with a chuckle. "But you were looking a little upset there. What's wrong?"

She shrugged halfheartedly, not quite sure how to put her thoughts into words. Finally, she just said, "Mama," then closed her eyes.

When she opened them, though, she saw the Doctor looking at her with sympathy. "I'm so sorry, El. No one should have to lose their mother to...whatever it was that messed her up like that."

"The bad men," she replied. "They hurt her. She showed me in her memories. Long story," she said simply. The Doctor nodded in understanding. "You can tell it when we have more time, then. And I promise I won't be mad."

El nodded and said "I know," but was back inside her head. No matter what she thought of Rose, her mother definitely wouldn't be angry with her for thinking of someone else as...her father. Was Papa even her real father, or did he just call himself that? Based on what Kali had said, it seemed to be the latter.

Finally, El brought herself back to reality. The Doctor wasn't looking at her- he had his eyes on the road. But she made herself say it. "I think of you like that. Like my dad, I mean." Then she looked away

and stared straight ahead.

A moment later, though, she turned back to look at him- he had stayed silent. Was he angry with her?

When she saw the expression on his face, El knew that he wasn't. Rather- much to her confusion- he looked like he was about to cry. Almost. His next words came out very slowly.

"You think of me as...your dad?"

That had been *very* unexpected. Her telling him that she viewed him as her father caused a strange wave of emotion to come over him. *Human* emotion.

Shock, naturally. A strange bit of happiness because of that secret hope. And, of course, love. Love for the girl who had just said that so matter-of-factly that she probably wasn't lying. And he knew that he thought of her as his daughter just as much as she thought of him as her father.

But a small, doubting part of his mind told him that that couldn't *possibly* be true, so he asked her. Just to make sure.

And her answering grin told the Doctor something else- whether they were related by blood or not, she was turning out to be so much like him. Was that a good thing? He didn't know. And what she said next only confirmed that realization even more.

"Obviously."

He couldn't think of anything to say, so he just smiled at her. The way her eyes lit up told him that she understood. And then she did something that surprised him just as much- not more, but close.

She reached over and took his free hand. He tightened his grip on her reassuringly as she asked, "Are we good?"

He nodded. "Yeah, El. We're good."

They stayed quiet for the rest of the drive and kept their eyes ahead, although El didn't let go of his hand. He tensed as they pulled in through the front gate. "We're here," he said simply when they stopped, and turned to look at her.

She was scared, that was plain to see. She was as tense as he was, if not more. Her breathing was shaky, and he noticed a slight tremor in her hands. "Hey," he murmured, reaching out to touch her cheek with his free hand. "I will be right there the whole time. I'm not gonna let anything happen to you, alright?"

El nodded, and he bent down to kiss the top of her head. "We'll be okay. I promise. Love you," he added in a whisper.

She smiled slightly, then repeated his words- although he knew she meant it. "Love you."

As they headed towards the lab, the Doctor promised himself that he would protect El and keep her safe, even if he died trying.

(A/N: El talks a lot more than in the show in this chapter, but when you think about it, that makes sense. She spent close to a year with two of the smartest people that ever lived, so I think she'd know more big words and talk at least a little more normally.)

18. Chapter 18

Chapter 18

Plan of Action

(A/N: Rose gets to be a badass in this chapter. I mean, she already is one, but it shows quite a bit here. Hope you like it!)

Loud clattering emanated from Joyce Byers' kitchen. Food containers, metal shelving, and a number of frozen items were thrown from the freezer and left on the floor.

Rose didn't think too much of the noise at first, until she heard what could only be the sound of glass shattering. She entered the kitchen to find Dustin emptying out the freezer, and Steve holding something wrapped in a blanket- the Shadow-Walker carcass.

"What on Earth are you *doing*?" she exclaimed, eyes widening as she took in the mess.

"Yeah, is this really necessary?" Steve added, and Dustin rolled his eyes.

"Yes, it is, okay? This is a groundbreaking scientific discovery. We can't just bury it like some common mammal, okay? It's not a dog."

"All right, all right, all right," Steve muttered in resignation, moving forward to put the carcass inside. "But you're explaining this to Mrs. Byers, alright?" Rose nodded in agreement. "Yeah, you don't just *put a dead body* in someone's freezer!"

Steve struggled with the body for several moments. "Christ. Help me out."

"What am I supposed to do?" Dustin asked. "Get the door, man. The door."

When they managed to slam the freezer door shut, Rose walked back

into the living room.

There, Lucas was sweeping up broken glass while Max held the dustpan and Mike continuously paced around the room. "Mike, would you just *stop* already?" Lucas exclaimed.

"You weren't in there, okay, Lucas?" Mike shot back. "That lab is swarming with hundreds of those Shadow-Walkers."

Rose spoke up before Lucas could. "Mike, the Doctor will take care of her. I know he will."

"Like *she* needs protection," Max added from her spot on the floor.

Steve walked over, nodding in agreement. "Listen, dude, a coach calls a play in a game, bottom line, you execute it. Alright?"

Mike sighed in exasperation. "Okay, first of all, this isn't some stupid sports game. And second, we're not even in the game, we're on the bench."

"Right, so my point is..." Steve thought for a moment, then nodded slowly. "Right, yeah, we're on the bench. So, uh, there's nothing we can do."

Dustin shook his head and said haltingly, "That's not...entirely true." Rose raised an eyebrow at him as Steve turned to look in his direction. "I mean, these Shadow-Walkers, they have a hive mind. When they ran away from the bus, they were called away."

Lucas seemed to catch on and added, "So if we get their attention-"

"-Maybe we can draw them away from the lab," Max concluded. Mike let out a breathless laugh. "Clear a path to the gate."

Steve, however, had another opinion. "Yeah, and then *we all die!*"

Dustin rolled his eyes. "That's one point of view." Rose smirked and nodded. "Look, I've got experience in this. I think we can do it. I mean, when you see a problem, you can either do nothing or you can do something. And, well...I don't want to try nothing."

Steve let out a sigh and threw his hands up in resignation. He opened his mouth to say something, but was interrupted when Mike exclaimed, "I got it!" He ran down the hallway and pointed at a section of the map. "This is where the Chief dug his hole. This is our way into the tunnel. So..."

He walked along until he came to a large spot on the floor. "Here. Right here. This is like a hub. You've got all the tunnels feeding in here. So-"

Rose cut him off with a gasp. "We set it on fire," she murmured, a grin slowly spreading over her face. "Because it hates the heat. So if we light it up-"

"-Oh, yeah, that's a no," Steve interrupted, turning to give Rose an incredulous look. "You're actually agreeing with this?"

Rose shrugged. "Why not? It would work. The Umbra would call away his army and give the Doctor and El time to close the gate. I say we burn it."

Steve was at a loss for words. "Wha..." He stared at her incomprehensibly for a few moments. Finally, he regained his ability to speak. "Lady, you're insane."

Dustin let out a snort. "The Doctor's her husband, man. What do you expect?"

Steve's eyes widened. He asked her "You're married to him?" almost at the same time as Rose said indignantly, "We are not married."

Dustin snorted again. "Uh-huh. Sure. Lucas and I saw you in the classroom last year being all lovey-dovey, and we *all* saw you playing kissy-face earlier. Official or not, you are *so* married that it's sickening. Lucas, back me up on this."

Before Lucas could say anything, Rose snapped, "Tha's not important. Alright? We need to focus on the task at hand. What are the roadblocks? Let's see..." she mumbled to herself. "They'd all come to stop us. But-"

"-We circle back to the exit really quickly," Mike said. "By the time

they realize we're gone-"

"-El would be at the gate," Max concluded.

Suddenly, Steve started clapping his hands. "Hey, hey, *hey*! This is not happening."

"But-" Mike protested.

"No buts. I promised I'd keep you shitheads safe, and that's exactly what I plan on doing. We're *staying here.* On the bench. And we're waiting for the starting team to do their job. Does everybody understand that?"

"*Steve*!" Rose scolded. "Mike was right- this isn't some bloody *game*! And I am *still* the adult here! With over 300 years of experience, mind you. Yes, it'll be dangerous. But will it be worth it? Absolutely. Now-" She gave him a pointed look to silence him when he tried to protest. "Am I being reckless? Well, maybe. A little. But I would die before I let anyone get hurt. That includes all of you, and it also includes the Doctor and El. 'M not gonna just sit here and let them walk into their deaths! So if I say we go, we go!"

"Hear, hear!" Dustin shouted, clapping his hands. Steve wrung his hands and held them up in surrender. "You're crazy. You're all out of your minds! You'll get yourselves killed!" He walked into the other room, pacing and still arguing under his breath.

But everyone jumped from frayed nerves when they heard the sound of a revving engine. Max startled and ran to the front window, Lucas just behind her. "Shit! Oh, shit." Turning back around, she said, "It's my brother Billy. He can't know I'm here. He'll kill me. He'll kill *us*."

Rose's eyes widened. "I won't let 'im hurt you, Max. I swear it."

Steve sighed. "Hold on. I'll be right back." He headed outside and slammed the front door behind him.

Rose watched from the window, with Max, Dustin and Lucas crouched down beside her. They saw Billy speaking to Steve, an arrogant smirk on his face. Then, he turned his head toward them, pointing with his cigarette.

Even from the window, Rose knew what he said- she knew how to read lips. "Then who is that?"

"Shit! Did he see us?" Lucas shouted as they all ran back to the center of the room, and Rose shushed him. "Don't panic. I know how to-"

She was cut off by the front door flying open. Standing in the doorway was Billy. "Well, well, well." He walked in and slammed the door shut. "Lucas Sinclair. What a surprise." He moved closer and Max shrank back. His voice was dangerously low as he said, "I thought I told you to stay away from him, Max."

"You disobeyed me. And you know what happens when you disobey me."

In the momentary pause that followed, Rose stepped between him and Max. "Leave her alone. I know who you are. So why don't you turn around and walk out of here while you still can?"

Billy smirked. "Why don't *you* move out of the way, sweetheart? I'd hate to mess up that pretty little face of yours." Rose, of course, remained where she was.

He sighed. "Okay. I didn't wanna have to do this, but..."

He drew back his arm, intending to swing at her, but never touched her. For she grabbed his upper arm and held it, pinned, in an iron grip at his side before he knew what hit him. "You may want to rethink that move, mister," she said with a wry grin.

Billy kicked at her with his foot, but she was ready for him. She moved to the side and avoided him with great ease while still maintaining a hold on his arm. However, he managed to wrench it free a second later. When he came at her again, she dodged his fists. Then she swung her left leg up high and gave him a roundhouse kick to the side.

He groaned and moved backwards, but didn't fall. Steve stumbled back in just in time to hear Rose snarl at Billy, "Get out."

Billy stood back up, smirked and swung at her face again. She ducked to avoid him before delivering a nasty right hook to his face. "Yes!

Kick his ass, Rose!" Dustin yelled. "Murder the son of a bitch!"

She was able to get a few more solid punches in before he was pinned against the kitchen counter. Quickly, he reached to the side, grabbed a plate, and shattered it against her head.

Rose stumbled backward, briefly blinded. That split second was enough for Billy to hit her in the face once and send her to the floor, but Steve stepped in front of Rose before Billy could do any more damage. He managed to punch Billy a few times, but it soon became clear who the better fighter was.

Billy managed to knock Steve to the ground in the living room while Rose ran to help him. By the time she got there, Billy had Steve pinned and was hitting his head repeatedly. But Rose had a secret weapon.

She gripped the syringe Max had frantically passed to her, lunged forward, and jabbed it into Billy's neck.

He turned around, confused, then his eyes fell on the syringe protruding from his neck. As he stood up, he said, dazed, "The hell is this? You bitch, what did you do?"

He stumbled and fell backwards in an almost comical way, then started laughing as he laid on the ground. Rose stepped back in time for Max to run forward, Steve's nail-covered baseball bat in her hand. She walked up to him, held the bat up above her head, then said, "From here on out, you leave me and my friends alone, do you understand?"

"Screw you," Billy drawled, and Max brought the bat swinging down between his legs. She hadn't hit him, but it had been dangerously close. Then she pried the bat from the floorboards and held it up again. "Say you understand! Say it! *Say it*!"

"I understand," Billy muttered, though it was barely audible.

"What?" Max snapped. Billy let out a long sigh. "I understand," he repeated, louder. Then, his eyes rolled back into his head and he lost consciousness.

Max dropped the bat onto the floor with a loud clang, gave her brother a scornful look, then stepped away from him. Rose, in turn, walked over to him, gave him a similar glare, and snapped, "*That's* what happens when you mess with a Torchwood agent. Oh, and you, of course, Max."

Max ignored her last sentence in favor of raising an eyebrow and asking, "What's Torchwood?"

Without hesitation, Rose replied, "Secret government organization. My dad was the director in a parallel universe, so he took me on as an agent. Long story."

She said this all very fast.

"Huh," was all Max could think to say in response. Afterward, she bent down and retrieved Billy's car keys from the pocket of his jeans. She threw them in Rose's direction, who caught them in one swift move. "Let's get out of here," Max said.

In another, more deserted part of Hawkins, Joyce, Hopper, Nancy, and Jonathan had just stepped inside Hopper's cabin. Nancy switched on the lights while Jonathan laid Will down onto the sofa. "It's actually...kinda nice," Nancy said slowly, and Hopper chuckled. "Thanks."

Joyce crossed over to the small fireplace in the corner, and crouched down beside it. "We'll do it here," she murmured.

They dragged the small metal-framed bed over to the corner and set Will down on it. They tied down his ankles and wrists with rope, before placing several small space heaters on the floor and furniture around him.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Jonathan asked his mother slowly. Joyce was almost snarling as she replied, "This thing has had Will long enough. Let's kill the son of a bitch."

Nancy lit the match that started the fire, while everyone else moved about turning the knobs on the heaters to activate them.

Please, for the love of God, Doctor, don't be wrong, Joyce thought to herself.

(A/N: Chapter is a bit shorter, but I'm already working on the next one and may do a double update. Stay tuned!)

19. Chapter 19

Chapter 19

Fighting With Fire

(A/N: Meant to do this earlier, but some crap came up that kept me busy. Sorry. But I hope you like this- Rose is still a major badass!)

"*We'll be okay. I promise. Love you."*

The Doctor's reassuring words echoed in El's mind as she stood facing the lab. Most of her bad memories were made within its walls, so it would have been odd for her to not feel apprehensive. Even if the possibility of death wasn't hanging over both of their heads like a dangling sword.

The Doctor must have sensed her lingering fear as he walked around from behind the van to stand beside her. The machine gun in his hands looked very out of place- didn't he hate guns? He slung the strap over his shoulder and held onto it with one hand. The other he held out for her to grasp, and she took it without hesitation. "I'll take care of things up front, all right? You save your strength till we've reached the gate."

Even when he gave her instructions, his voice was still gentle and soft, like he was afraid he'd scare her if he spoke too loudly. Not that El minded, of course. Whenever he spoke to her like that, it somehow made her feel safer. Like she was protected.

El nodded in response to his words, and they set off for the entrance to the lab.

The first thing Steve Harrington registered when waking up was a canister of gasoline, the liquid sloshing around the container. Then a blurred face. "Nancy?" he mumbled. Then his vision cleared- it wasn't

Nancy at all, but rather Mike, who was giving him an offended look.

Then the pain returned. Instinctively, his hand went to the injury on his face and he groaned. "No, don't touch it," another voice instructed- Dustin. Steve turned his head, and his vision went out of focus for a moment before returning to something resembling normalcy. "Hey, buddy," Dustin said cheerfully. "It's okay. You put up a good fight. He kicked your ass, but you put up a good fight. Rose kicked his ass for you. You're okay."

Then Lucas' voice came into the picture, and Steve realized that he was sitting in the backseat of a car, and Lucas was in the passenger seat. "Okay, you're gonna keep straight for half a mile, then make a left on Mount Sinai."

He turned his head. Rose was sitting in the drivers' seat, looking at him. They were actually going *through* with their insane plan. "Oh, my God," Steve groaned.

"Just relax," Dustin said. "It's not like she doesn't know how to drive. Okay?" Steve just repeated "Oh my God" louder.

"Hey, we promised that you'd be cool, okay? Rose and I *promised*. Everybody else wanted to leave you behind, but we said no." Steve started yelling about what was going on just as Rose hit the gas pedal. The car's engine revved as it picked up speed, and Rose chuckled. "I think I like this car, Max," she said, turning to look at her in the backseat.

"Oh my God! No, whoa! Stop the car. Slow down." Mike sighed in frustration and snapped at Dustin, "I *told* you he'd freak out." As Steve screamed and the boys argued, Rose started yelling. "Everybody *shut up*! I'm trying to focus!"

"Oh, wait, that's Mount Sinai! Make a left!" Lucas shouted, and Rose did as he asked. The tires screeched due to the sharpness of the turn, and Lucas and Max screamed.

Once Rose had gotten the car back onto a normal length of road, she looked around at her rattled passengers. "Sorry, guys. I guess I got a little carried away there," she said, laughing breathlessly. But she still

didn't slow down.

Inside Hopper's cabin, Will finally opened his eyes, gasping. His skin was slick with sweat from the heat, and his breathing was labored. He struggled to sit up, but couldn't get very far due to the restraints. "What's happening?" he said with a groan.

Then he started shouting. "It hurts. It hurts! Oh, it hurts! Let me go! Let me go! *Let me go!*"

Joyce set her jaw firmly, then turned the knobs on the heaters all the way up to the maximum. "Mom," Jonathan protested as Will continued to scream.

"No," she replied firmly. The Umbra had held Will captive for long enough. Its time using him as a host was up.

Rose veered the car off of the road and onto the patch of grass near the hole that led to the tunnel entrance. She slammed on the brakes at the very edge.

"Oh, hello!" Steve yelled as the car came to a stop. "Whoa!" Dustin exclaimed, and Mike gasped out, "Incredible."

Max smirked. "Forget me, she's the real zoomer." Dustin nodded rapidly. "Yeah, no shit."

The kids all scrambled from the car, making for the trunk. They pulled out various goggles and face covers and started putting them on, while Rose came to the aid of a disoriented, protesting Steve.

Even with her help, he all but fell out of the car, sank down on all fours, and started groaning. "Guys," he groaned, leaning heavily on Rose as she helped him to his feet. "Oh, no. Hey, guys," he said, but they ignored him.

"Hey," Steve snapped as Mike walked past. "Hey, where do you think you're going?" When Mike ignored him and started tying a rope to the undercarriage of the car, Steve yelled, "What are you, deaf? Hello! We are *not* going down there right now! I made myself *clear*!

Hey, there's no *chance* we are going to that hole, alright?! This ends *right now*!"

"Steve, Steve, you have to *calm down*," Rose murmured, putting a hand on his shoulder. Dustin nodded in agreement. "Look, you're upset. We get it. But the bottom line is, a party member requires assistance, and it is our duty to provide that assistance. Now, I know you promised Nance that you would keep us safe."

He reached into the trunk and removed a backpack, the baseball bat protruding from it. Dustin handed it to Steve. "So keep us safe."

Steve let out a resigned sigh, shook his head in frustration, and grabbed the backpack.

He all but dropped into the hole, a pair of swimming goggles and a red bandanna covering his eyes, nose, and mouth. Rose lowered herself down immediately after. "Hey, why isn't your face covered?" he asked. "Isn't it, like, poisonous down here or something?"

Rose smirked. "I'm immune. Being practically immortal has its advantages."

Even from behind the goggles, she could see the shock on his face. "Oh. Okay."

Mike, with a map in his hand, shouted ahead of them, "Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's this way."

Dustin answered him. "You're pretty sure, or you're certain?"

"I'm 100% sure! Just follow me and you'll know."

That statement didn't sit well with Rose. "Oi! I don't think so." Mike, in turn, walked over and gave her an incredulous look. "What?" he hissed.

She rolled her eyes. "Any of you kids die down here, *I'm* getting the blame. Got it, Michael?" Rose took the map from him and started walking ahead. "From here on out, I'm leading the way. Steve, you guard us from behind!"

"Okay!" he yelled back. "Come on, let's go!" Steve urged, motioning for them to pass him. "Hey, a little hustle!"

No one dared argue with either of them- this was life or death.

The Doctor made his way through the lab with El at his side. She grasped his free hand tightly, while he shone a flashlight down the corridors- more for El's benefit than his own. The gun sat unnervingly at his side, the strap slung over his shoulder. He kept trying to tell himself that it didn't matter if he shot to kill at the Shadow-Walkers, as they would all die when the gate closed anyway. But carrying the gun still bothered him.

Oddly enough, the halls were empty of Shadow-Walkers, the only sign that they had ever been there being the casualties. His stomach contracted each time he saw a body. Another pointless death.

Due to the narrow passageway, the Doctor and El moved single-file down the stairs- at least until the former spotted blood on the rails and heard low groans of pain. "Stay here," he instructed, making his way down the steps slowly and carefully.

As he turned the corner, the Doctor was met with a rather unpleasant sight- Owens propped up against the wall, a small wound in his chest and another, bigger wound in his right leg. But he was still alive, which was a better state than the others they'd come across. "Oh, God," he whispered, moving closer.

He removed the gun upon reaching Owens, crouching down. "Oi, you alright, mate?" he asked, not waiting for an answer. "Nasty little buggers got you pretty good, didn't they?" When Owens moved his head in what might have been a nod and started to open his mouth, the Doctor said, "No, no, no. Don't talk, you'll waste your energy. Hang on," he murmured, reaching into his coat pocket. A moment later, he removed a length of something that was similar to leather. "All right. Now, I may not actually be a doctor, but I know how to apply a tourniquet. This may hurt a little," he said as he started tying a knot over the injury to stop the bleeding.

A few moments later, Owens' head jerked up, as if he was looking at

something ahead of him. The Doctor knew who it was without even having to look. "Oh, yeah," he said brightly. "I've been meaning to tell you. This is Eleven, but she prefers El. El, Doctor Owens. Doctor Owens, El." He finished tying the tourniquet- which caused Owens to grunt in pain- and moved away from him slightly. "She's been staying with me for...about a year, give or take a few weeks. And she is...about to save the universe." The Doctor turned around and gave her a half-smile. "Normally, that's *my* area of expertise. But I suppose we can't all play the hero all the time, eh?"

Then he turned back to look at Owens. "Maybe when this is all said and done, you can help her out, too, you know?" he murmured. "Maybe you could help her have, like, a relatively normal life. One where she's not poked and prodded and treated like some kind of lab rat."

The Doctor let out a sigh, a tiny smile on his face. "Just a thought. But...think about it, okay? I mean, if this all goes well, everyone in the universe will owe her a debt. But if you help her, I'll consider it paid."

He reached into his pocket again. "It'd be wrong to leave you defenseless...he muttered. "Oh, here." He held out something to Owens that could've been a gun, but it definitely wasn't from Earth. "Stunner. Forgot I had it, actually," he said, half to himself. "That's the problem with bigger-on-the-inside pockets- you tend to lose things in them." Ignoring the confused look on Owens' face, the Doctor smirked. "Don't go anywhere."

As they both walked away from him, the Doctor could hear Owens chuckling slightly. "You got it, Doc."

Rose made her way through the maze of tunnels, checking behind her every few seconds to make sure everyone else was still alive. They were, but often lagged behind due to being mesmerized- dangerous or not, the tunnels were admittedly fascinating.

"God," Lucas gasped out, and Max piped up, "What *is* this place?" Rose sighed. "Guys, come on. We need to keep moving."

Steve all but shoved the other kids forward, urging them on. "Move it, you idiots," he snapped, and for once Rose didn't scold him.

As they made their way through the correct tunnel, it suddenly dropped off into a large room. Several other tunnels also led to it, and vines littered the ground. "All right, Michael," she murmured. "I think we found the hub."

"Let's drench it," Mike replied, without hesitation.

They sprayed the walls and roof and doused the floor with every bit of gasoline they had. When it was as covered with fuel as possible, Rose pulled out a silver cigarette lighter. "Alright, you guys ready?" she asked. When everyone else replied "Ready," she uncapped the lighter. With a click, a small flame appeared.

"Time to burn you to the ground, you bastard," she snarled.

Then she flung the lighter away, and the whole room came alive with flame.

20. Chapter 20

Chapter 20

Problems and Solutions

(A/N: Yay for the real double update! Things get intense here- lots of POV switching. Oh, and emotions, especially at the end. You'll see what I mean.)

Far away, deep in an isolated area of Hawkins, Will Byers lay down on a bed inside a cabin, screaming bloody murder. It was painful for Joyce to watch, and Jonathan hadn't been able to watch at all. But it was necessary- they had to force the Umbra out of Will.

When Jonathan finally made himself look back at Will, he started yelling at his mother about how it wasn't working and that she was killing him. But Nancy interrupted them when she noticed something.

"Jonathan! Jonathan! His neck!"

The veins on Will's neck had turned black, and his mouth opened. A moment later, ethereal, inhuman screeching filled the air. It wasn't Will making that noise, but rather, the Umbra.

Somehow, Will yanked one of his tied hands free, and started untying the other one. When Joyce moved forward to stop him, he clamped his hand around her neck with impossible force, choking her.

"*Mom*!" Jonathan yelled.

The Doctor and El knew when they were just outside the room that contained the gate- lights flickered, and soft growling emanated from behind the double doors.

"Stay here," he ordered her, just as he had when he spotted the blood on the stair rail.

The Doctor crept down the hallway, stopping at the open side door. He hid behind it, suddenly remembering a trick his father had taught him when he was a child. Rather than walking right into the room- and into the claws of the Shadow-Walkers- he reached into his pocket and removed an ancient silver knife he kept with him. He used the blade as a mirror to see into the room, and found that there were no less than three Shadow-Walkers still above ground. He let out a sigh, wondering how exactly to deal with them without getting mauled or worse. *This is bad*, he thought to himself. *I mean, I was expecting it to be, but I still don't know what I'm going to do.*

The moment the flames sprang up, the screaming began. The ground itself seemed to squeal with pain. "Everyone RUN!" Rose ordered, shoving them in the other direction.

They didn't need to be told twice.

Joyce fought to free herself from Will's grasp as the veins on his face also turned black. She gasped for air and clawed at his fingers, but her efforts had no effect on him.

Nancy was as paralyzed as Jonathan and Hopper were, until her eyes fell on the fireplace poker. The tip was glowing red-hot from being in the flame. She lunged forward with a new sense of determination, grabbed onto it, and after only a second of hesitation, jabbed it into Will's side.

The lights flickered and the ethereal screams resumed, but Joyce was free. She gasped for air as Hopper ran forward to help her. After a moment, when Will's body started convulsing, Joyce yelled, "Get the hell out of my son!"

He was going to have to run in there and start shooting. The Doctor knew that there was no other way around it. He checked to make sure that the gun was loaded, clicked it shut, and pointed it ahead of him. His voice shook as he counted under his breath. "One. Two." A pause. "Three!"

Time seemed to slow down as he broke cover, pointed the gun forward, and ran in. One of the Shadow-Walkers opened its mouth, letting out a screech that was probably his name. The blood pounding in his ears made it difficult to tell.

And then…

It was as if a bomb had exploded. The Shadow-Walkers all started squealing in unison- something was hurting them. They all dove for the same hole, disappearing into a tunnel at the foot of the glowing red rift.

At the same time, the Umbra- who had been fighting a losing battle to keep control of Will's body- finally surrendered. The hollow screams suddenly turned human, and black smoke poured from Will's open mouth.

It swirled up in a tornado-like formation, then flew upwards and zipped away through the door, vanishing into the night air.

Will was now unconscious, slumped over on the mattress. Joyce and Hopper worked to untie his restraints, then she and Jonathan called out to him, waiting for him to wake up. "Will, please," Joyce whimpered.

His eyes opened very slowly, and Joyce sobbed out of relief. "Will!"

"Mom?" he said slowly. Then he shot up into a sitting position and embraced his mother and brother, crying himself. A moment later, he pulled Hopper into a hug as well.

After they had all calmed down, he asked, "M-Mom? Where's Rose?"

Joyce let out a sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob. "She's okay, baby. She's okay. I don't know where she is right now, but I know that she's okay."

While the other three of them were talking, Hopper reached for his radio. Static crackled, then faded away as he spoke into it. "Doc, are you there? Do you copy?"

A moment later, he answered. *"Yeah, I'm here."*

"Close it."

After the Doctor received that instruction, there was nothing for him to do but follow it. He shared a glance with El, moved forward, and helped her onto the lift. As it lowered them both to the gate, her breathing grew heavy. When it came to a stop in front of it, she took his hand.

He tightened his grip on her in what he hoped was a reassuring way, and she- much to his surprise- sent him a mental message, the way she had a year ago when she thought she was saying a final goodbye to him. But this wasn't a goodbye or an apology- rather, it was a statement of gratitude.

Thank you for saving me.

Then she held out her hand.

"Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God!" Dustin yelled as he ran alongside his friends. Rose yelled back for him to save his breath. Steve kept everyone moving forward, until Mike tripped and fell.

A tendril crept up his leg, and Mike screamed for help.

Steve, Dustin, and Lucas grabbed onto his shoulders and tried to pull him up. Rose suddenly ran over, shouting, "Back! Everybody get back!"

She swung Steve's baseball bat up high over her head, then brought it down onto the vine. She struck it again two more times until it was severed, and Mike scrambled up to his feet. "Thanks!" he called out. Dustin said frantically, "Guys, we gotta go, we gotta go now."

They all spun around, though, when they heard the growling. A Shadow-Walker was in front of them, snarling. Only Dustin seemed unafraid.

"Dart," he said slowly. It made a soft hissing noise in response. He

stepped closer, and was immediately yelled at to get back. However, he shushed them until they stopped protesting. "Trust me. Please."

The Shadow-Walker moved forward very slowly. "Hey. It's me." Dustin pulled down his bandanna and removed his goggles. "It's your friend. It's Dustin."

He crouched down in front of it. It moved closer still, but didn't attack. Rather, it made a trilling sound that almost seemed *friendly*. "Will you let us pass?"

Dart roared at him in anger, and Dustin held up his hand in a request for quiet. "Okay, okay, I'm sorry. I'm sorry about the storm cellar. That was a pretty douchey thing to do," he said with a chuckle. Dart let out a sort of squawking noise.

"You hungry?" he asked, smiling. "Yeah?" He reached into his backpack, pulling out a 3 Musketeers bar. "I've got our favorite, see? Nougat. He removed the wrapper and set part of it down.

When Dart started eating, Dustin motioned for the others to move forward, and they didn't question it. "There's plenty. I've got more." He placed the rest of the candy bar on the ground and stood up. Turning around, he sighed. "Goodbye, buddy." Then he trudged after his companions.

As they kept walking, Rose couldn't help but think that what Dustin had done was exactly the sort of thing that the Doctor would admire. He always tried to get along with as many species as possible, including the dangerous ones.

"Let's go," she hissed, running for the tunnel exit.

Meanwhile, the Doctor was having a rather difficult time watching El strain herself the way she was. The obvious presence of the living shadow just on the other side made him want to take her away from all of it just to keep her safe. But he also knew that she was pretty much the only chance they had of keeping the Umbra contained.

El, meanwhile, squeezed her eyes shut, and Kali's words resurfaced in

her mind.

"I want you to find something from your past, something that angers you. Now channel it."

When she had first received that instruction, she had been angry about the wrong things- a girl that was actually quite nice, a ridiculous argument she'd had with the man who may as well be her father. This time, she focused on the true objects of her anger and hatred.

Being thrown into a tiny box, her Papa callously observing her distress and doing nothing- in fact, he had caused it. It made her think back to the argument she'd had with the Doctor. Whenever Papa was angry with her, it was for not following his orders, for not being his perfect little *experiment*. Whereas when the Doctor had been angry with her, it was because she had put herself in danger. One of them had been motivated by selfishness, the other by love for her.

That was how El knew which one of them she would rather call a father.

Her eyes flew back open, and the gate slowly began to seal itself off. Just behind her, the Doctor's mouth fell open slightly. *She's actually doing it. Please, El, don't die on me because of this*, he pleaded silently.

As Rose, Steve, and the kids ran through the tunnels, they were very near the exit when the ground started to shake. "Jesus!" Dustin shouted.

Rose didn't even wonder what was happening, because she already knew deep down. El was sealing off the gate.

The roars of distant Shadow-Walkers brought everyone back to their senses. "They're coming," Rose shouted. "Run!"

A few more feet, then their eyes fell on the rope. "Here! Come on!" she yelled.

Max was the first one that made it up, followed by Lucas, Mike, and Dustin. Then the roars of the Shadow-Walkers grew louder. "Oh,

shit!" Steve swore, and Rose muttered curses under her breath.

Everyone else was yelling for them to climb up, but they remained where they stood. Steve was slightly in front of Rose, shielding her as he was the only one who had a weapon. The screams of the boys and Max rang in Rose's ears as the monsters drew closer. She held up her hands and exclaimed as she waited for the attack.

It never came. The Shadow-Walkers ran right past them, oblivious to the potential prey, and everyone knew why. They were trying to prevent the destruction- or at least defeat- of their master.

"Eleven," Mike said.

The screech of the first Shadow-Walker got the Doctor's attention. Immediately he aimed the weapon, but couldn't see his target.

Then one screeched just above his head. It was hanging upside down from the top of the lift. He fired a single shot that was so precise, it collapsed.

A second one came right after, and he shot it down too. Then he saw more climbing up the walls in droves. "Bloody hell," he muttered under his breath.

He waited for them to turn around, to open their mouths. When they did, he would fire a single bullet down their throats, and they would fall to the ground.

Despite the fact that he was an excellent shot (something on the long list of things he hated about himself), the Doctor knew that he would run out of bullets sooner or later. He could only hope that El would close the gate before then.

More memories flashed through El's mind, giving her just enough strength.

"*You have a wound, Eleven. A terrible wound."* Kali invading her head. Seeing herself get taken away from her mother as a baby. Touching the Shadow-Walker in her mind and its turnabout to attack her.

"*The gate. I opened it. I'm the monster."* Causing this rift due to fear and no one helping her. Having to admit that to Mike.

She let out a strained cry. A tendril of living smoke and shadow broke from the rift and started inching toward her.

"*And it's festering. And it will grow. Spread."* Seeing her mother dragged away, screaming that Jane was her child. Then her being hurt by the bad men. All the times Papa mistreated her.

"*And eventually, it will kill you."* All of those memories filled her with enough rage and determination to fight that she held out both of her hands and started screaming. She felt herself being lifted off the ground, but didn't care. All that mattered was sealing off the gate and stopping the shadow before it reached her. The air in front of her seemed to be pushing it back.

Just when everyone had made it to safety and were out of the tunnels, the headlights on Billy's car suddenly grew very bright. All of them had to shield their eyes from the intense glare.

The lamps inside Hopper's cabin grew brighter than what was normal, perhaps even possible. The house lit up like a beacon as Joyce, Jonathan, Nancy, and Will all looked around in confusion. Hopper was the first to understand why.

El continued screaming- a long, high, ripping scream- as the gap grew thinner and thinner. Eventually it grew so narrow that the Umbra had no choice but to withdraw its arm and retreat as the gate sealed.

The place where it had been open glowed for a brief moment as the gap closed entirely, then faded to black. Finally, El let go, and she collapsed back onto the lift.

Even in near-total darkness, the Doctor could see the falling bodies of the Shadow-Walkers. Mike and Will had been right- closing the gate killed anything connected to the Umbra's mind.

But the Doctor only looked for a brief moment, then turned all of his

attention to El. He kept her from collapsing completely onto the cold metal, bending down to steady her as she threw her arms around him. A moment later, she started sniffling and sobbing quietly.

"You're okay, El," he murmured, his own voice breaking. "It's all okay now. You're safe. We're *all safe*." He tilted his head and pressed a kiss to her cheek. "Shh...we're going home."

Even so, he held her in his arms for a little while longer before pressing the button to activate the lift. She was so exhausted that he carried her out of the lab and set her down in the van's passenger seat. She fell asleep before he even made it out of the parking lot.

He arrived back at Joyce's house around the same time as everyone else. Fortunately, though, Joyce was able to let him in so that he could put El on the couch before Rose, Steve, and the kids- other than Will- caught sight of him.

Max, Dustin, Lucas, and Will crowded around him, asking him about ten questions every 30 seconds despite his repeated requests to please, please, *please* slow down and talk one at a time. Steve just awkwardly stood in the corner until Joyce told him that he could go home if he wanted to- he looked tired. Mike was at El's side, holding her hand. He had actually hugged the Doctor when he returned and told them that El was perfectly fine, just asleep.

But that was nothing compared to what Rose did when she saw him. Once she managed to embrace him amid a lot of tears and laughter (and kissing), Hopper nearly had to pry them apart almost a minute later, while Joyce yelled at them because "There are *children* present!" Which, of course, led to said children complaining about how they weren't kids. (Before that, though, Max and Lucas in particular had been gagging in a *very* exaggerated way.)

Dustin had cause to freak out a few minutes later. Out of nowhere, the Doctor blurted out a question- he asked Rose to marry him, seriously this time. Which was when Dustin yelled, "Oh, SHIT!" Rose, of course, accepted, and Hopper rolled his eyes at them. Joyce glared at him after that, and told Hopper to "Leave them alone, they could have *died*!"

After that, Rose stayed at El's side, along with the Doctor and Mike. When she finally woke up the next morning- Joyce had insisted that all three of them stay the night- she was nearly overwhelmed by three people hugging and smiling at and talking to her.

She returned to the TARDIS after bidding Mike, Will, Jonathan, and Joyce goodbye- it was especially emotional for Mike and Joyce, the latter of which seemed to be treating her like a daughter. El promised to come visit them soon.

When the call came from Hopper a month later, they did exactly that.

(A/N: Relax- we aren't done yet! There's still more to go. See ya soon!)

21. Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Making Things Right

(A/N: We end The Gate in this chapter! But hey, I'm doing a post-S2 epilogue, and there might- don't get your hopes too high, but there *might*- be more to come. Like a couple of oneshots or something. Or who knows, maybe I'll suddenly become imaginative enough to do my own thing! I have no idea what I'll do after writing the epilogue, to be honest. That may have to be the end of it till season 3 comes out- I need a break from writing fic. Anyway, hope you like this!)

The TARDIS came to a stop with a quiet thud in the middle of Hawkins, Indiana. A month had passed since the gate had closed- it was barely December.

This wasn't their first time visiting Hawkins since the trouble with the Umbra. They had come back a few times before, so that El could discreetly visit her friends- and so that the Doctor and Rose could ensure her freedom.

That had been quite a long and arduous ordeal- the scientists were very evasive and reluctant. They kept bringing up what-ifs and increasingly unlikely scenarios. A favorite of theirs was trying to insinuate that El was a danger to others. The Doctor would hear none of it, and eventually lost his temper with them. The only one that wasn't glared at was Owens- he had been more sympathetic than his colleagues. But the Doctor's words probably still rang in their ears, judging by the long silence that followed them.

"*Bloody hell! She's* thirteen years old*, and you talk about her like she's a known criminal! What-"*

"*She killed people."*

"*In* self-defense*! The people she killed treated her like an experiment, an* animal*! She was scared! She would never have killed them if they weren't hunting her. She just wants to be safe and not have to look over her shoulder for the rest of her life!"*

"*But-"*

"*No buts! I won't hear another word of it! Did I mention that she's thirteen?! She is a* child*, for God's sake! A child! She's not Carrie! So why don't you just agree to leave her alone?!"*

Something that was almost as taxing emotionally was hearing El's story in full detail, a week after they left Hawkins. Rose had nearly cried when she described the encounter with her mother. And the Doctor felt a mix of anger and sympathy towards Kali. El kept insisting that she had good intentions, though, so he couldn't be too mad.

After that, he had taken her to her mother's house to apologize to her aunt. Becky *had* cried when El showed up at her door, looking happy and forlorn at the same time.

The Doctor explained the situation to her- El had been living with them for close to a year, and she had run off, which was how she came to be at her mother's house. But she was here to apologize, at the very least. Both for stealing from her and running off again.

Becky was so relieved that her niece was alright that she wasn't the least bit angry. She told El that she could come and visit anytime she liked, something the Doctor and Rose had no problem with. The latter shed a tear when El said goodbye to her mother.

And then he took her to Chicago, wanting to meet Kali. It required a bit of work, but they were able to find her, camped out in a deserted back alley with her gang. They probably would have been killed, too- if it wasn't for El's quick thinking.

She ran in front of the Doctor and Rose, shouting that they weren't going to hurt anyone. She walked right up to Kali and threw her arms around her, murmuring that she came to say goodbye, and that she

wanted to thank her.

Kali wasn't particularly warm to either the Doctor or Rose, as she was very distrustful. But she had asked them to look after her sister for her, and gave them a hint of a smile. In return, the Doctor gave her a phone number to call if she was ever in a desperate situation, and a promise to take care of El.

Since then, they'd visited Hawkins a few times to keep in touch with everyone, but this visit was different. Hopper had called him to let him know that Owens had finally made a deal, and wanted to meet the Doctor in an inconspicuous location- a bar.

Before that, though, there was something he needed to know- the lab was being shut down due to an information leak. Nancy and Jonathan had been intentionally brought into the lab and secretly documented Owens' confessing involvement in her friend Barbara's death to them via a tape recorder. They made copies of the tape and sent them to every major newspaper they could, along with a false but believable story about a chemical leak. When the Doctor received that news, he almost laughed aloud- the lab wouldn't be able to do any more harm. He made a mental note to thank Nancy and Jonathan later.

The Doctor was still a bit apprehensive, though, as he entered the agreed meeting place. As people in the bar caught sight of him, he got some odd looks- in a place like Hawkins, strangers stood out. He turned his attention to a small TV for a moment, if only for a brief distraction.

A reporter was onscreen, talking about the very thing Hopper had mentioned- the shutdown of Hawkins Lab.

"*Since the release of the incendiary tape, the once quiet town of Hawkins, Indiana, has spent time in a place it never expected: the national spotlight. Under mounting pressure, several high-ranking members from the US Department of Energy have admitted involvement in the death and cover-up of Hawkins resident Barbara Holland, who died due to exposure to an experimental chemical asphyxiant, which had leaked from the grounds of the lab. We sent our own April Kline to Hawkins to speak to residents,*

residents who told us they thought they lived in a safe town. The kind of town where, they say, nothing ever happens."

Oh, the irony. *That last sentence sounds like the beginning of a horror film*, the Doctor thought to himself, the reporter's voice fading into the background.

He was snapped back into reality when he spotted Owens seated at a booth, eating a sandwich. "Ah," he muttered, striding over to the table and sitting down across from him.

Owens smiled when he came into view. "Doc. Good to see ya."

The Doctor grinned, any lingering unease fading. Owens may have run Hawkins Lab, but he seemed genuinely kind- not a manipulator like Brenner was. "Hello. How's the leg?"

He shrugged. "Better. Much better. Lucky you found me when you did; I owe ya. Pretty sure my football career's over, though." Both of them chuckled lightly at his joke. Then he moved his plate forward. "Hey, you want some of this? There's no way I'm gonna be able to finish it."

The Doctor shook his head. "No, I'm good. Don't need it." Owens laughed again.

"Well, you're a better man than me. And, that reminds me. I got a little something for you," he said, reaching for something at his side. Then, he slid an envelope across the table. Curious, the Doctor tilted his head and picked it up. When he opened the envelope, his eyes widened. Inside was a thin piece of paper- an official document- with information on it that, whether it was falsified or not, made all the difference. As his eyes scanned it, Owens said, smirking, "Congratulations, Doc."

The document was a birth certificate, stating that he was the legal father of one Jane Eleanor Tyler. And Rose was her mother. "I thought-"

When Owens saw the look on the Doctor's face, he chuckled. "Sometimes I impress even myself. The Chief and I worked it all out,

in case you're wondering. And if you're curious about the names, well...for you, we figured that since you don't technically have a legal name, we'd use the first name from your alias and your wife's last name. And for the girl...she's gotta have a reason for that nickname of hers, right?"

The Doctor took a deep breath, put on a neutral expression for a moment, then smirked. "Yeah, I suppose so. Funnily enough, when her friends introduced her to me, they said her name was Eleanor. Coincidences are really something, eh? What the universe does for fun, I always said."

Owens shrugged. "Well, that's one way to put it. But, uh...I think she'll be happy. Both of them will. Your wife and your daughter."

"*Technically*, as of right now, Rose isn't my wife just yet. But I get your point. They'll both be *very* happy, I reckon. So...we're all good? El will get to live the life she deserves to have?"

Owens chuckled and nodded. "Your girl's gonna be fine, Doc. With you around, I don't think she'll have anything to worry about." Then he paused, his expression turning serious. "I'd still let things cool off for a while, though, if I were you."

"How long is a while?" he asked. El wouldn't be happy about that at first, but this time around, he wasn't going to cut her off from the world she knew.

Owens thought for a moment, then replied, "Want to be safe? I'd give it a year."

"A *year*?" he repeated. That seemed a bit extreme. But Owens was probably right, and it was better to be safe than sorry.

Then he remembered something- a way he could make it up to her. Absently, he picked up half of a sandwich from the plate. "Quick question..." he murmured, his words somewhat muffled by food. "What about one night out?"

Owens seemed confused by his question. "One night?"

"Yeah. How risky would it be if she were to go out for one night?"

Owens gave him an incredulous look, shrugging. "What's so important about one night?"

He chuckled, swallowing the food in his mouth. "Well..."

"Yeah, you got it," Joyce said encouragingly. "See?"

Will groaned. "Mom!" Jonathan, meanwhile, was recording them with his video camera, laughing. Will turned his head and gave Jonathan an annoyed look. "Do you *always* have to be filming everything?"

Jonathan shook his head. "No, no, just the good stuff."

Will didn't try to argue with him on that and instead asked his mother, "Are you sure people still dance like this?"

Joyce smiled. "Yeah, it's just what's happening."

Will turned back to look at Jonathan. "*Is* it what's happening?" Jonathan chuckled and nodded. "Yeah, it's what's happening."

Joyce smiled widely as Will twirled her around, but he let go of her when their doorbell rang. "I'll get it!" he yelled, running for the door.

She grinned and turned to Jonathan. "They're here."

Then, the door opened, and the cheerful voices of the Doctor, Rose, and El emanated throughout the room. Will embraced Rose enthusiastically, laughing. "I've missed you guys!"

The Doctor gave Will a confused look as he entered the house and started walking towards Joyce. "We've only been gone for a week," he said, grinning as he finished his sentence. Then he hugged Joyce. "Hello. How are you?"

Joyce gave him a warm smile. "I'm good. We're good. Now, where's El? I- oh, there you are, honey," she said, turning to glance at her. El smiled somewhat nervously, then walked over. "Hi."

Joyce's eyes widened as El moved closer. "Oh, you look so *pretty*!" she exclaimed, eyeing the blue dress she had on, as well as her slightly

curled hair and hint of makeup. "Did Rose do your hair?"

El nodded, grinning. "Yeah. Thank you. Penelope said I looked nice, too."

When Joyce gave her a confused look and started to ask who Penelope was, the Doctor quickly answered for her. "My mother. Long story."

Then Rose and Will walked over to them, and the two children hugged. They had a sort of bond- they were friends, yes. But there was a certain amount of closeness that made the Doctor think of siblings. They were, in a lot of ways, like brother and sister. He had helped her quite a bit, too- a large part of the reason that El spoke and acted more like someone her age was due to spending time with Will and Jonathan. And her other friends, of course. She was very clever, and picked up on things fast.

Joyce complimented Rose on her outfit- a forest green velvet dress with bright red heels and lipstick, before lapsing into easy conversation with her. Will alternated between goofing off with El and asking the Doctor all kinds of questions related to science and technology. He grinned and patiently answered every one of them as he flipped through a book. Jonathan took several pictures, as did Rose.

Before long, it was time for all of them to leave the house, and the Doctor agreed to meet Joyce at the middle school. Within five minutes- thanks to the help of the TARDIS- they were all there in the parking lot. Loud music blared from inside, and people were everywhere.

Rose and Joyce made chitchat as they dropped off Will, El, and Jonathan. Jonathan said goodbye fairly quickly, but it took longer for Will, as his mother was still fretting over him.

El, in turn, said goodbye to Rose, hugging her. Then, she threw her arms around the Doctor in such a way that Joyce grinned. "Aww, that's sweet."

Her hugging him like that wasn't new, so he paid no mind to Joyce.

Then she kissed his cheek. *That* was new. She stood up on her tiptoes and whispered something in his ear.

"Love you, Dad. See you and Mom later."

He refused to tell Rose and Joyce why he couldn't stop grinning like an idiot.

El called out to Will, as he was several paces ahead of her inside the gymnasium. "Hey, wait up!"

Will stopped walking and turned around. "Oh, sorry. Come on, El." He grabbed her hand and guided her up to the sign-in table. Mr. Clarke was seated there, making notes.

When his eyes fell on Will, he grinned. "Hello, sir. Looking good tonight. Is, uh, is this your date?"

They both chuckled, and Will said, "No, she's not my date. She's just a friend of mine. Her parents are thinking of moving here, and since I was going to the dance, they agreed to let her come too. We just showed up at the same time."

Mr. Clarke nodded in understanding, then glanced at El. "You look a little familiar. Have we met before?" When she shook her head no, he said, "All right. Well, what's your name?"

"Jane," she replied, smiling. "But my friends call me El."

Then Will handed over their tickets and they all but ran through the double doors.

People were already on their feet, dancing to the music. But Will spotted their friends before long, and they weren't on the dance floor.

Mike, Lucas, and Max were all sitting down at a table. Dustin was nowhere to be found- he probably hadn't shown up yet.

Mike grinned at Will and said an excited hello, then almost froze up when he noticed El. "H-Hi, El."

El smiled nervously at him. "Hey, Mike."

Lucas cleared his throat behind them loudly. "Hey, El. Good to see you. Ignore Mike, he gets nervous around pretty girls." Mike started to argue with him, but found that he couldn't quite form words.

Then Max practically shoved Lucas out of the way. "Move it, stalker." Grinning, she pulled El into a tight hug. Then, when she moved back and got a good look at her, Max exclaimed, "Holy shit, what happened to you?"

El didn't answer her question- instead, she shot back, "What happened to *you*? You *hate* dresses. You look pretty, though."

Max smiled, but rolled her eyes. "Thanks. Although I'm not sure if it's worth it. You're right- I *do* hate dresses. Anyway, how have you been?"

El talked with Max pretty much the entire time until Dustin showed up. That came as no surprise to Mike, Lucas, and Will- they had become fast friends after the gate closed and the Doctor started bringing El to visit. Max kept talking about getting El her own skateboard and teaching her how to use one.

When Dustin made it to their table, though, everyone became singly focused on antagonizing him, starting with Mike. "What the hell happened to you, man?"

Dustin's face fell. "What do you mean, 'what happened'?"

Lucas grinned as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "Dude."

"Your hair," Max added, and Lucas raised his hand to poke it. "Is there a bird nesting in there?"

Dustin started talking very rapidly. "What's wrong with my hair? Nothing's wrong with it; there's no bird nesting in there, asshole. I worked hard." Lucas raised his hands in surrender. "Okay. Yikes."

Dustin's eyes fell on El. "Oh. Hey there, El," he said, grinning.

Then El, who had been trying *very* hard to keep quiet, burst out laughing. Dustin groaned. "Aw man, not you too."

She let out a snort. "Forget the hair, you're dressed like my dad! With your bow tie and the tweed coat and- are you wearing *suspenders*?"

Dustin got very defensive. "So what if I am? But *do not* say that! I am not dressed like the..." He trailed off, eyes widening. "Oh, my God. Forget what I'm wearing, you just..."

After that, he and his friends all started to act like they had forgotten how to speak, and were instead staring, wide-eyed, at El. She raised an eyebrow at them. "Why are you *looking at me* like that? What's gotten into you?"

"Dude..." Dustin said slowly. "You just called the Doc your dad."

El gave him an annoyed look. "And?" Dustin opened his mouth to protest. "That's- you- what-"

She rolled her eyes. "Who cares if I did? By next year I'm gonna start telling people he's my dad anyway. And...he is, so..." El shrugged.

Max grinned. "R-Really? Does...he know you call him that?" El nodded, then grinned sheepishly. "I think I freaked him out. But in a good way. He was smiling, I think."

Then the music slowed. *Time After Time* started playing, and Lucas turned to the side. "Max?"

She raised an eyebrow at him as he spoke. "Hey. Um...it's nice, right? You want to, um...you want to, like...you know? Like...just you and me?"

El started wheezing from suppressed laughter. "I think Lucas wants to dance with you, Max."

Lucas froze. "Uh..."

Max smiled, chuckling. "Yes, stalker, I'll dance with you. I'm assuming that's what you were asking."

Lucas looked thoroughly embarrassed. "I-I wasn't. But if you want to..."

She rolled her eyes and grabbed his hand. "*So* smooth. Come on." Then she dragged him to the dance floor.

Then an unknown girl appeared. "Hey, Zombie Boy," she said, looking at Will. "Do you wanna dance?"

Will started stammering. "Um...I don't..." El jabbed him in the side with her arm and he got out, "I mean, yeah. Yeah, sure."

The girl laughed. "Cool." And then they too walked away to dance.

Dustin looked around the room once, his eyes settling on a group of girls. He exhaled heavily. "Wish me luck, Mike, El. I'm going in."

El rolled her eyes, and Mike called out as he walked away, "Yeah, you'll really need it!"

Then it was just the two of them. They sat down at the nearby table, Mike pulling out El's chair for her. They made casual conversation that bordered on awkward for a minute or two, then El turned her attention to the dance floor.

"Max looks happy," she mused, and Mike nodded. "Yeah. I mean, I guess." And then his eyes shot over to another part of the dance floor. "Hey, is that Nancy?"

El tilted her head in confusion, her eyes following his. "Is she dancing with *Dustin*?" El said, a grin unfurling on her face. Mike nodded excitedly. "Yeah, she is. Oh my God."

Outside the school, Joyce said goodbye to the Doctor and Rose- they were going to come back in an hour or two. Rose wanted to go get something to eat in the meantime.

As they walked away, they came across Hopper, who said a brief hello to them before walking over to Joyce. "Hey," he murmured, leaning up against the car next to her. "I just came here to make sure El was doing alright. But...eh, I dunno. Thought I might find you out

here."

Joyce chuckled. "Will wanted me to give him some space, so...I'm giving him a few feet."

In answer, Hopper smiled and held up a pack of cigarettes. "What do you say? I'm pretty sure that Mr. Cooper retired in the 70s, so...we might be okay."

She smiled at him as he put a cigarette between his lips and lit it. A few moments later, she whispered, "Give me that," and took it from him.

She puffed on the cigarette, and despite her efforts to keep a straight face, collapsed into coughing a few moments later. Hopper laughed quietly.

His face turned serious, though, as he asked, "How are you holding up?"

"You know," she replied listlessly, looking at the floor and biting her nail. Hopper sighed and nodded in understanding. "Yeah, I know. That feeling never goes away. It is true what they say, though. Every day, it does get a little easier."

Joyce nodded slowly and leaned into his side. Hopper sighed heavily, putting an arm around her. "You know, I told the Doc about Sarah. A year ago, after we thought El had died. I told him the same thing I just told you. But this is...different from that, somehow. I can't really figure out why."

Joyce gave him a small smile. "I'm sure you'll figure it out eventually."

He smiled back, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. "Thanks, Joyce."

Mike and El both were laughing- partly at Dustin and Lucas, partly at a story she had just told about the Doctor. Then, the music suddenly changed. The song was one that El recognized- she was pretty sure it was called *Every Breath You Take*. Rose had it on a CD somewhere.

"Oh, I like this song," she said, smiling. Mike raised an eyebrow at her. "R-Really?"

She gave him an odd look, laughing slightly. "That's what I just said, right?"

Mike nodded. "Uh, yeah. Right, sorry. Um...do you wanna...dance?"

El sighed. "I don't really know how."

"I don't either," he replied without hesitation. "Maybe we can figure it out together."

She chuckled. "Okay."

"Okay?" he repeated, and she nodded. "Yeah. Let's go."

With that, El stood up and took his hand. He led her to the dance floor, and she put her hands over his shoulders. He, in turn, put his arms around her waist.

Mike was strangely quiet for a few moments, and then he blurted out, "You look beautiful."

El had no idea what to say, so she smiled. Something about the way Mike said that reminded her of something that happened earlier in the evening- the Doctor had said the same thing to Rose. El wasn't sure why, but that reminder was enough to make her blush slightly. She kept the smile on her face, and Mike grinned at her. He looked happier than he usually did. And she felt...different. Yes, she felt happiness, but it was a different kind. It wasn't the warm, slow sort of feeling she was used to, but rather a sharp burst. She wanted to...well, she wasn't really sure what she wanted to do. That was confusing.

She danced with Mike for a while without saying anything. Then, out of nowhere, she noticed that he was giving her an odd look. El opened her mouth to ask him about it, but was stopped by his lips against hers.

Oh. *That* was what she had wanted to do.

She didn't really kiss him back, as she wasn't sure what she was supposed to do. But she didn't pull away from him, either. Was this what it felt like to kiss someone? She wondered. It felt...warm. Good.

When he moved away from her, she smiled. Ordinarily, she would've said something to him, but decided that she didn't need to. He gave her a warm, almost *loving* smile. That was the only way to describe it, she realized with a jolt. Did he love her? The way her mother and father loved each other?

El resolved to ask him about it later as she leaned her forehead against his. That was a little awkward, as he was clearly taller than her, but neither of them cared. They were safe, they had each other back, and everything finally seemed all right.

Far away, yet somehow incredibly close, a creature of living shadow lurked over the parallel version of the middle school.

One day, when I have grown stronger, I will have my revenge, the Umbra vowed.

(A/N: AHH, FEELINGS! My feelings are doing weird things! Just the epilogue to go. Also, I hope my explanation about El seemed solid- she talked and acted more like a regular kid because she picked up on things from her friends and parents. I mean, it's my headcanon that she's actually scary smart once she learns the basics of a subject. Like she can grab whatever it is with both hands and run off with it. The Doctor is definitely an example of this, and she probably gets it from him. One other thing is, when Owens referred to the Doctor's alias, he meant the whole John Smith thing. So technically, on that piece of paper, his name is put down as John Tyler. Just wanted to avoid any confusion by explaining that. Anyway, I loved writing this and I love my readers. Stayed tuned for the conclusion!)

22. Chapter 22

IMPORTANT UPDATE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Hey, everyone! BadWolfeRose here. This is just a courtesy notice to all who are fans of this story. I won't be continuing on this website, as I have decided to reboot this fanfic series, ever since I was inspired to include a third fandom, and will be rebooting *and* continuing this story on my Archive of our Own account under the same pseudonym. The title of the first fanfic is The Wolf, the Girl, and the White Violin. So, if you want more of this world, head on over to my ao3 and read what I've got up! Love you all for your support!

-Emma